

28th September, St. Wenceslaus, Martyr (the famous “Good King Wenceslaus” of the Christmas carol)

We pay a lot of attention to the readings at Mass, and rightly so, because Sacred Scripture is the inspired word of God. However, do we notice the priest's prayers such as the entrance antiphon, the collect (opening prayer) the prayer over the gifts, the communion antiphon and the prayer after communion?

These change according to the liturgical year, or if it's a saint's day or some other feast. The prayers for today's optional memorial for St. Wenceslaus reflect his qualities and his martyrdom. St. Wenceslaus was brought up as a Christian in the Bohemian Royal family and when he became king of what is now the Czech Republic, his promotion of order in society and care for the poor, was not popular amongst the leading classes or even in his own family. Aged only 28, he was murdered by his brother's accomplice, but was immediately proclaimed a martyr for Christ and a saint. He is the patron saint of the Czech Republic.

The Entrance Antiphon proclaims St. Wenceslaus as a holy man who “fought to the death for the Law of God and did not fear the words of the godless, for he was built on solid rock”. The Collect acknowledges that St. Wenceslaus placed heavenly values above earthly ones, the priest prays that we may too hold fast to God “with all our heart”. We assent with an “Amen”.

In the Prayer over the Gifts the priest asks God to sanctify (make holy) our offering so that we, by the grace of God may be “set afire with that flame of love through which St. Wenceslaus overcame every bodily torment.” Wow – that is a strong prayer – again we assent with an “Amen”.

The Preface (the prayer leading up to the Holy Holy Holy) is variable and the priest has a choice, except on particular solemnities. The preface is addressed to the Father (as are most prayers of the Mass) and begins by praising Him, and then turns to reflect the qualities of the saint and thank the Father for the graces He has bestowed on the saint, and asks that He give us the same graces.

The communion antiphon for today's memorial is a quotation from the Gospel of St. Matthew, “whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” (Mt. 16:24). This reflects St. Wenceslaus putting Christ before himself and that he did pick up his cross and follow Him. Finally, the prayer after communion invites us to go

forward, fed and strengthened by the mysteries of Mass and the grace of the Sacrament, so that we can do as the page did in the carol,

In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted
Heat was in the very sod,
Which the Saint had printed
Therefore, Christian men, be sure, Wealth
or rank possessing
Ye who now will bless the poor,
Shall yourselves find blessing.

Carol Ann Harnett

28th Sept 2020



X. Good King Wenceslas.

Chorus.

Good King Wen - ces - las look'd out, On the Feast of Ste - phen,

When the snow lay round a - bout, Deep and many and a - yen!