

THE PASSION AND MIRACLES OF THE
BLESSED ÓLÁFR

*Here begins the Passion of the blessed Óláfr, king and
martyr*

3 When the illustrious King Óláfr ruled in Norway, a vast
country located towards the north and having Denmark to
the south, there entered into that land the feet of them that
6 preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good
things. The peoples of that country, previously subject to
the ungodly rites of idolatry and deluded by superstitious
9 error, now heard of the worship and faith of the true God—
heard indeed, but many scorned to accept. Living in a re-
gion close to the north, it was that same north, from which
12 comes every evil over the whole face of earth, that had
possessed them all the more inwardly and gripped them all
the more firmly in the ice of unbelief. From its face Jeremiah
15 saw a seething pot; and in Isaiah there is the boaster who
says, 'I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will
sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides
18 of the north.' But the great and praiseworthy Lord, who
builds his city on the sides of the north, scattered the rig-
our of the north with the mild wind of the south and at last
21 softened the stubborn and fierce hearts of savage peoples
with the warmth of faith. They heard of the teaching of the
Lord, and he sent messengers to them as heralds of his
24 word. They should preach in those parts the truth which is
in Christ Jesus, overthrow the cult of idols, promise un-
failing life and eternal joys to those who believed, and deter
27 the unbelieving and contumacious with the fear of judge-
ment to come and everlasting torment.

Now this kingdom, as we have said, was ruled by King
30 Óláfr. Although a pagan, he was nevertheless benevolent
by nature and from a certain nobility of mind very eager to

follow the ways of righteousness. Having learnt the purity of Gospel truth in England, he took the faith wholly to heart and with devout zeal hastened to receive baptismal grace in the city of Rouen. Purified thus at the health-giving font, he at once became a different man and, as the apostle said, was buried with Christ by baptism into death. Forgetting what had gone before, passing on to things to come, this most perfect observant of the faith he had adopted walked in newness of life. All vain pleasure seemed paltry to him, and the glory of earthly kingship grew vile in comparison with heavenly bliss. Although of royal rank, he was poor in spirit, and though involved in worldly affairs, he yet gave his mind to heavenly matters. Whatever divine law forbids he vehemently rejected; whatever that law commands he embraced with the most ardent love.

Not content with his own salvation, he strove with unflagging urgency to convert the people he was appointed by divine providence to govern. And by a new order of things, the king played an apostle's part and he, the ruler, himself preached the grace of the word of Christ to all people far and wide. Moreover, by the grace poured into his lips, he led not a few away from the abominable worship of demons to knowledge and veneration of their Creator. His wonderful devotion and most abstemious life kindled in the hearts of many contempt of this world and love of the heavenly homeland. Whose stubbornness, whose hardness of heart, was not subdued by the sweet words, full of spiritual wisdom, of the illustrious Óláfr? Whose torpor and sloth were not roused by his peerless conduct?

Even in the midst of a vicious and perverse nation he made many converts. Yet he also had very many strong and mighty enemies, who were moved more by wilfulness than piety, more by custom than reason, more by rash fury of spirit than love of truth. They fought with all their might

against the message and holy works of this most noble martyr of Christ and sought to overthrow the just ways of the Lord.

3 But the righteous man, bold as a lion, was without dread and, following the example of the blessed Job, he did not fear a great multitude nor did the contempt of families terrify him. Nor could he be turned from his steadfast preaching
6 by the threats and plots of enemies.

Gracious Jesus, what labours, what persecutions he endured before he was able to turn that unbelieving and hostile nation from its perversity! Without doubt, it was given to him not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for his
9 sake. Not only was he ready to suffer, not only ready to yield up the crown of temporal kingship for Christ's sake, but he also desired to win the glory of everlasting felicity
12 through the crown of martyrdom. Oh, what ardour of devoted love, what fervour of faith, inflamed the breast of this most excellent martyr of Christ, in the midst of savage
15 people who, trusting in their own folly, were in Solomon's words less safe to encounter than a bear robbed of her whelps.

Yet whenever he could, in public and in private, he never
18 ceased to pour forth before them the message of faith and salvation which they detested. He accomplished much in a short time and won a countless multitude for the Lord. People
21 flocked eagerly to baptism and the number of believers grew day by day. Idols were smashed, sacred groves felled, temples overthrown. Priests were ordained and churches
24 built. The people made offerings with devotion and zeal. The worshippers of idols were put to shame and those who put their trust in graven images were confounded. In many
27 parts of that land the host of unbelievers were silenced, not daring to murmur, and all iniquity stopped her mouth.

The king rejoiced beyond belief to see the dearest fruits
30 of his labours now come to pass. But the unwearied preacher of the Gospel never ceased, now to persuade the obstinate,

now to instruct the ignorant, now to strengthen those frail
 in the faith. In his reign he showed nothing of kingly pride,
 nothing of tyranny, but rather furnished to all an example 3
 of great humility and mildness. Concerned moreover for
 the future welfare of the people he ruled, lest the lordly and
 powerful should oppress the lowly with their might, he 6
 composed and proclaimed laws both ecclesiastical and civil,
 full of great wisdom and framed with wonderful discern-
 ment. In them he assigned to each estate its proper rights, and 9
 determined within strict bounds what authority the bishops
 should have over their people and what deference the people
 should show their bishops. In this he was a most moderate 12
 and just judge, and wisely bearing in mind how often kings
 arrogantly misused their subjects, he restrained and bridled
 royal licence with the rigour of law. These laws reveal how 15
 devoted this glorious king was to God, how benevolent to
 his fellow-men.

Words cannot express the many benefits the oft-named 18
 king conferred upon his people, the good he did while he
 governed them, by enacting laws and relieving the poor,
 by diligent preaching and by the example of his most holy 21
 life. But in return he had many trials and tribulations to
 endure from the people, until at length he could not op-
 pose the multitude of evils. Thinking the moment required 24
 it, he withdrew into Russia till the Lord should deign to
 find a time suitable for him to fulfil his desire and purpose.
 Let no one suppose that this most stalwart and steadfast 27
 champion of Christ was subject to human weakness, that
 he retreated for fear of martyrdom. For he had often courted
 martyrdom of his own free will, as the outcome of events 30
 and his illustrious death made manifest. For the benefit of
 others he saved himself to await a more favourable moment,
 when he might present more plentiful fruits to the Lord 33
 and return with manifold interest the talent entrusted to him.

Therefore the glorious martyr of Christ went into Russia where he was nobly received by Jaroslav, the magnificent
 3 king of that realm, and held in the highest esteem as long
 as he chose to remain. He stayed there for some time, and
 left the inhabitants with a model of upright life and a famous
 6 recollection of his piety, charity, kindness and patience.
 At length, refined by the fire of persecution and exile, found
 acceptable and worthy to sustain greater trials, prompted
 9 by divine inspiration, he returned by way of Sweden to
 his native land. By the grace of God, conferred upon him
 more abundantly than ever, he was there received by many
 12 with ardent longing. Favoured and long wished for by good
 men, he appeared fearsome and terrible to opponents of
 wholesome instruction. Clad in the breastplate of faith, girded
 15 with the sword of the spirit which is the word of God, in
 honour and dishonour, evil report and good report, with
 the armour of righteousness on the right hand and the left,
 18 the illustrious preacher steadfastly sowed the word of faith
 wherever he went, ready to suffer any persecution for Christ's
 sake. He willingly put himself in the way of dangers, not
 21 refusing to accept martyrdom if it was God's will.

And since the labourer is worthy of his hire, it pleased
 the Lord at last to bring his champion out of the prison of
 24 the flesh, that he might receive in fullest and superabun-
 dant measure the reward of his labours and that the king
 might see the King in his beauty. People in that particular
 27 part of the country where his most holy body now rests were
 obdurate and inflexible in their malice, inexorable enemies
 of the truth and so of the king. The martyr of Christ chanced
 30 to come into that district to preach God's grace to the un-
 believing people. When the enemies of the truth learnt this,
 they summoned a wicked council and gathered together
 33 against the Lord and his anointed. For his preaching of
 salvation was entirely opposed to them and their works.