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Commemorate St. Václav Day!

Invitation and Suggestion



Pope Pius XI Pays
Tribute To St. Václav



Favorite Theme In Art

Published by the

NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF BOHEMIAN

(CZECH) CATHOLICS OF AMERICA

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The National Alliance of Czech Catholics, organized to weld Czech Catholic societies, clubs, parishes, clergy, periodicals and newspapers into a more compact and efficient unit for the enrichment of national, religious, social, charitable and cultural life in this country, had its inception in the tempestuous years of the World war.

Since that time it has played an important role in the post-war Social Reconstruction Movement. It devotes due attention and energy to the solution of the present day problems so that its members enjoy a full measure of social, religious and cultural benefits and advantages.

The cause of clean morals, vigorous Catholic Press, retreats for laity, its own Radio Broadcast, and its own Youth Organization, have ever been close to its heart.

It also provides student aid particularly to candidates for the Holy Priesthood. It has published a series of text books for the study of Czech language, history and literature and several timely pamphlets.

Through its membership in the National Catholic Welfare Conference it participates in other national movements such as the Catholic Radio Hour, Industrial Conferences and many others.

Bohemian (Czech) Catholics of America believe that its program of activity is worthy of your interest and support.

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The National Alliance of Bohemian (Czech) Catholics,
3205 West Cermak Road, Chicago, Ill.

Commemorate St. Václav Day!

Invitation and Suggestion

For over a thousand years of the existence of the Czechoslovak nation Saint Wenceslas has been the symbol of its strength and the protector and patron of its people. Throughout both the darkest and the most glorious periods of the nation's history he has remained the Guardian of his Country and Saint of the Catholic Church. His achievement of securing for his people the benefits of medieval European civilization is acknowledged by all Czech historians and scholars, regardless of their political or religious convictions, to be of inestimable significance. They extol him as a national hero, deserving of the veneration and honor of his entire race for all times. Since the national culture, moreover, is based on Christianity, and since St. Wenceslas has been invoked for centuries as the national patron, his sainthood has been closely linked with the destiny and even the very existence of his nation.

The National Alliance of Bohemian Catholics believes that the example of a man like St. Wenceslas, who in private life was irreproachable, and through his public career sought only his country's welfare, may induce many not only to emulate his example, but to measure their lives by the lofty standard which his life presents. The National Alliance, therefore, cordially invites and earnestly urges all the Czech people of America, especially Catholics, to commemorate in a worthy manner the anniversary of the death of this great hero and saint, by means of Holy Masses, celebrations, plays, radio broadcasts, and lectures which would impress upon all the Czechs and Americans of this country the significance of the martyr and lead to a strengthening of the faith for which he sacrificed his life.

The feast day of St. Wenceslas, the 28th of September, has been commemorated by all classes of the Czech people since the

tenth century. In Prague a great pilgrimage is conducted annually to the tomb of the Saint. Every loyal Czech considered it his sacred duty to join at least one of these pilgrimages during his lifetime. Consequently The National Alliance of Bohemian Catholics feels highly honored in presenting to all the Czechs of America, for their emulation, Saint Wenceslas, who possessed all the principal virtues of mankind, and who was an ideal Catholic.

St. Wenceslas displayed great prudence and a deep desire for peace in his dealings with the Germanic Empire. When Henry the Fowler succeeded to the throne, he began to assume the right to control Bohemia, and to resume the traditional policy of penetration eastward, towards the lands inhabited by the Slavs. Henry, with his ally, Arnulf, overpowered the troops guarding the frontier posts, and appeared menacingly before Prague. At this critical moment Wenceslas was confronted by the serious and important question of what course to take. His decision showed his prudence and sagacity. He realized that, if hostilities were to continue, the country would be ruined and subjugated as had been other territories belonging to the Slavs. He knew that any resistance on the part of the Czechs would be made at the expense of a heavy sacrifice. He foresaw the disastrous results which his nation would have to suffer if it were conquered. He willingly resolved to submit, to recognize the sovereignty of the Empire, and to pay an annual tribute. No one accused Wenceslas of weakness or cowardice; but many historians credit him with uncommon insight into the situation and the consequences which might have followed had he acted otherwise.

What a lesson the modern world may learn from the Saint's life concerning peace, especially at the present time when the nations of Europe are crying out against one another, each protesting its own good intentions, while denouncing the war plans of some neighbor. While the life of any saint properly imitated can teach the wisdom of living a life of peace, St. Wenceslas in a particular manner impresses us with his sincere desire for peace. When he assumed control of his land, he declared: "May the love of peace at home and abroad animate the country." Saint

Wenceslas recommended peace to his people, and he himself set them a good example by living a life of peace. He taught them by his virtuous life that by overcoming selfishness, by praying rather than contending, he won that peace with himself and God which is the basis of all world peace.

Saint Wenceslas was a man of courage and fortitude. He defended his country against the enemies both within and without the boundaries of his land. The enemies within the dominion were nobles who were disturbing the peace. Of the courageous manner in which he reproached these grandees, Christian, one of the Saints biographers, speaks thus: "Wherefore ye sons of evil-doers, ye liars and iniquitous persons, wherefore did ye hinder me from learning the divine law of our Lord Jesus Christ and obeying His Commandments? If you find no pleasure in serving God, does this give you the right to prevent others? Till now I have been under your control. Today I throw it off, and shall serve God with my whole heart." He further indicated that he would no longer tolerate the intrigues that were going on during the regency of his mother. He said: "Let the judges beware of hindering useful enterprises. Let no one again be guilty of the abominable crime of murder, so often committed by you. If fear of the Supreme King does not keep you, O Princes, from transgressing His law, know that our wrath will blaze up against such evil-doers, and our zeal for the glory of God will visit with capital punishment all guilty of such crime."

His valor in conflicts with enemies of his country is confirmed by Christian, who is the only biographer to give a detailed account of the following event. "The Prince of Kourim, having gathered many people about him, began an insurrection against the Saint. Much blood flowed on both sides. Finally, it was proposed that the two leaders should decide the matter by single combat. When the two princes stepped forth for the encounter God caused the Duke of Kourim to see a vision—the Holy Cross resplendent on the breast of Wenceslas. Upon seeing this miracle he threw down his arms. Then he knelt at the feet of Wenceslas, and declared that none could vanquish one whom God miraculously

ly protected. As he spoke the Saint raised him up and gave him the kiss of peace. Without further conflict Wenceslas confirmed his power over the Prince of Kourim and his castle, but permitted him to retain possession of it for the remainder of his life." This legend is narrated to prove his preparedness for combat when the safety of his land was threatened. According to Gumpold, another biographer, he spoke these words to the nobles: "With the help of God I have governed and defended the land, so far as in me lay, against its powerful foes."

Saint Wenceslas was a man of justice. He devoted attention to a reform of the judicial system. By taking part personally in the procedure of the courts he attempted to reduce the number of death sentences. In order to do this he had gallows destroyed and certain prisons closed. At that time the accusations were made orally; and consequently, if his innocence were not immediately determined, or if the worth of the evidence were not properly estimated, an innocent person was often executed. Wenceslas wished to proceed according to the spirit of Christian love and justice, refusing to allow anybody to be condemned whose guilt was not definitely established or who committed an evil act unknowingly. He interested himself in the welfare of all regardless of condition or calling.

All his biographers are unanimous in praising the saintly character of Wenceslas. In an old Slavonic legend there is an account of his charitableness. "He went among the poor doing good." Christian says of him: "He was the untiring comforter of orphans, widows, the poor, mourners, and the injured; he fed the hungry; he refreshed the thirsty; he clothed the naked; he visited the sick; he buried the dead; he welcomed pilgrims and strangers as though they were his nearest relatives." The social problem he solved by means of sincere charity. He was guided by the precepts: "Be merciful" and "Whatever you have done to the least of these your brethren, you have done it to me." Dr. Kalousek explains the signification of the word "martyr" by citing the proclamation during the twelfth century of the Bishop of

Prague: "St Wenceslas earned the grace of sainthood, not because of the wound he received from his brother, but for the good deeds which he had previously performed he was crowned by God."

The death of the father of Wenceslas at the early age of thirty-three, the assassination of his grandmother St. Ludmila, and the courageous acceptance by Wenceslas of the invitation of his brother Boleslav, who treacherously invited him to a banquet, or, as events proved, to his death, even though he surmised Boleslav's evil designs — all bear witness that Wenceslas's character was formed amid suffering and self-sacrifice. Here we note the Saint's ability to suffer, and we draw from it another lesson. The ability to suffer is supposed to be the mark of greatness of soul. Through suffering a reward can be obtained. But there is another phase to this type of greatness. A man may be afflicted with trials and troubles, but in order to achieve merit he must have the proper attitude toward his suffering. This attitude, which we find developed to a high degree in the character of St. Wenceslas, is resignation to the Holy Will of God.

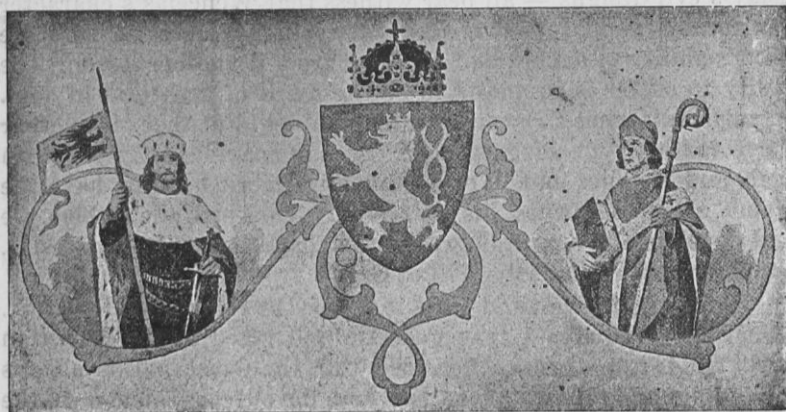
From the above cited facts it is easy to comprehend that St. Wenceslas lived like a true Catholic and ruled in the Christian spirit. It is not strange, therefore, that the Czech nation always and under all circumstances has had devout confidence in the powerful aid of the Saint. Naturally it has held in the highest respect and reverence everything that was dear to him, and it has regarded as precious its heritage from him of the Czech language and the Catholic faith. During the periods when the nation suffered oppression, the patriots pointed to the aid of the Saint: for "finally only so long shall we not perish, as long as he will assist us." Even today St. Wenceslas is willing to present our petitions to Almighty God. Let us prove to him, therefore, by our whole lives that we intend to remain his loyal Czechs. Then we may derive inspiration from the words of the Czech novelist, Wenceslas Benes Trebizzky:

"Should those grass covered graves open, and should our grievously tried and heavily oppressed ancestors within them

come to life, oh, surely they would spread the appeal throughout the breadth of our native land: "You Czech mothers, you Czech fathers, instill into your children a reverence for St. Wenceslas, who did not suffer us to perish, nor will he suffer you to perish."

"Saint Wenceslas, suffer not us nor our children to perish" is the prayer offered up for all the Czechs in America by

THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF BOHEMIAN (CZECH)
CATHOLICS.



Pope Pius XI Pays Tribute To St. Wenceslas

Excerpts from an Apostolic Letter of His Holiness, March 4, 1929 on the occasion of the thousandth anniversary of the Saint's Martyrdom.

Saint and King

Ever since he was committed by his parents to the care of his devout grandmother Ludmila to be educated and trained in the precepts of our holy Faith, St. Wenceslas began to excel in Christian virtue from his early childhood. In order to learn the

Latin language he was later sent to Budec, near Prague, where "there was a church dedicated to the Prince of the Apostles, St. Peter." On being chosen to succeed to the throne of his father, though barely of age, from the very start he declared that he desired "to serve God alone in sincerity of his heart." With fearless courage he restored order in government, stopped dissension and brought about the administration of justice. Devoted as he was, heart and soul, to the good of his country, he defended it against its enemies and was ever on the alert to keep it united and to make it prosperous. At the same time he was a mild ruler; "he ever endeavored to obtain peace without the ruin of others, without shedding the blood of innocent men, but through peaceful means and methods. Hence he ruled his people more by kindness than by command." In public he acted the sovereign, but at home, privately, he lived as austerely as a monk, wearing a hair shirt under his costly garments, and he was "ever solicitous to keep his heart pure and spotless." His devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament was most remarkable; as a boy, "nothing delighted him so much as attending the Holy Mass and serving the priest and even when he attained the rule, with his own hands he prepared the bread and wine necessary for the Sacrifice of the Mass."

Charity and Apostolic Spirit

Here we must also mention his beneficence and liberality, for which he was praised by all. "He was most compassionate to the poor, he solaced those in misery, brought joy to the poverty-stricken, he was the father of orphans, the defender of widows, with his own money he redeemed captives, he consoled anyone who had recourse to him in trouble." Who can doubt that all these splendid virtues of his had their source in his undaunted, and living faith? He always kept the Catholic Faith, not merely in his heart, but fearlessly professed it in public and unrelaxingly he sought to defend it and to propagate it. Consequently, as soon as he assumed the reins of government, his first care was to repair the losses of religion by recalling the exiled clergy, by opening the abandoned churches to Divine service, by rebuilding the

sacred edifices that had been destroyed and constructing new ones. The most famous of these latter was the church he built in Prague and dedicated to the holy martyr Saint Vitus, which in later ages was raised to the dignity of the cathedral and metropolitan seat, and which was in the year of the millennium renovated and solemnly consecrated again. It was his greatest solicitude to make Christian morals flourish in his dominions. For this reason, though he was ever a most gentle ruler, he severely punished "those who sought to spread false principles or corrupt good morals." This zeal for virtue brought him the hatred and ill will of the wicked. His own brother, Boleslas, giving ear to their slanders and joining in their plots, assassinated St. Wenceslas, with the help of several partners in his horrible crime, as he was at the door of the church dedicated to Sts. Cosmas and Damian in Stara Boleslav, where the Saint had been invited to celebrate the annual feast of dedication and to a festive banquet. St. Wenceslas died praying and conspicuous to the end for courage of soul and admirable forgiveness for his patricidal murderer.

Honored by Catholic World

We joyfully recount the noble deeds of our saintly patron, not that you may learn what you well know, but that it may be made clearer how rightly you pay him the highest honors, and how properly all the Faithful have always glorified the unconquerable martyr. You are well informed of the renown of the martyr-king immediately after his departure for heaven; not only in Stara Boleslav, which was ennobled by his holy blood, and in Prague whither his holy body was transferred after three years by order of his brother Boleslas himself, but in other regions beyond the confines of his native land. From all sides came requests for the relics of this servant of God, and in many places churches were erected in his honor. Passing these by, in Rome itself, since the fourteenth century an altar was dedicated to his honor in the very basilica of St. Peter, and upon the destruction of the old basilica, another marble altar was erected in its place in the new basilica, "notwithstanding that hardly any

other holy king has an altar therein"; and the feast of St. Wenceslas was celebrated there annually in the presence of all the Cardinals. The frequent miracles and many graces which are commemorated by Czech writers contributed not a little to the spread of the cult of the holy King. The name of Wenceslas, whom the Roman Pontiff, John XIII, adorned with the title of saint as early as the tenth century, was inscribed in the Sacramentary of that time and in many breviaries composed in the old Slavonic language. From the twelfth century on it also appears in the Latin breviaries, and the feast was celebrated in different places. This feast, Clement X of blessed memory, our predecessor, extended to the whole Church in the year 1670, and Benedict XIII raised it to a higher rank in the year 1729.

Best Loved of All Czech Saints

Since the martyr-king was honored so long and in so many places, it is no wonder that your nation always had a special devotion to him, and it may be truly said that the name of no other man of your race is so deeply enshrined in the minds of the Czechs or venerated so much among you as that of the Great Wenceslas. (Who is there that does not know that the privileges and right of sacred sanctuary was given to his sepulcher, and that his sacred image was held in honor in the homes, and also engraved on coins and public seals and reverently pictured on banners? His lance was carried into battle; the dignity and title of knight was conferred by a stroke of his sword; innumerable writers and thousands of memorials of every class of art have proclaimed his glory.) St. Wenceslas was always considered by all of you as a most excellent model and as your most powerful protector. Hence you are accustomed to ask his help in all your anxieties, in war, in misfortune, especially begging his assistance by the ancient hymn "that he would not let you perish nor your children." Moreover, all your life was so intimately entwined with the person and homage of St. Wenceslas, that whatever was dear and precious to you was called by you the heritage of Saint Wenceslas.

First of all, your ancestral religion, your language, your culture, your king's crown, your entire land. You call him truly the Heir or Owner of your country, as though, namely, your most holy King, enjoying the bliss of heaven, not only sends you ready help, but is still really the sovereign of your fatherland which he once endowed with so many benefits. For Wenceslas was not only the defender of the Catholic Faith, but also the father of the Czech land, since he refined its civilization, preserved it safe from its enemies and brought it to greater unity and prosperity. For this reason your martyr-king is held in esteem by the governors and people of your State, and this millennial anniversary is justly observed even by those of your fellow-citizens who are not of the Catholic Faith.

St. Wenceslas - Favorite Theme In Art

Ruler, warrior, saint, martyr, benefactor, intercessor, national patron and national hero—all these things St. Wenceslas has been and is to the Czech nation, and in some or all of these roles every Czech artist who chose the subject has attempted to portray him.

Little wonder, then, that the number of painters, sculptors, etchers and woodcarvers who have attempted to express in their works his significance, is legion. Little wonder, too, that every portrait, every statue presents him in a somewhat different light, so that in the development of his characterization we can almost trace the history of Czech painting and sculpture from the tenth century.

Fidelity Characterizes Artists

Perhaps the most amazing part of this cult of St. Wenceslas is the fidelity with which Czech artists of a high order have served his memory since that century, when an anonymous painter depicted him in his illustrations for a copy of one of the innumerable legends clustered about the saint.

Other countries have their patron saints, yet what other nation, even among so called Catholic countries, can boast a record of a thousand years' devotion to the memory of one saint, which has been again and again a fountain of inspiration for living works of art?

Would anyone today suggest to a member of the British Royal Academy that he devote his talents to a portrait of St. George? Would any member of the French institute consider St. Joan of Arc an alluring subject for his brush or his chisel? Has any German painter of national importance painted St. Boniface in recent years or any prominent Irish sculptor produced a statue of St. Patrick?

Yet, even during the last fifty years Czech artists of the first rank have vied with one another in giving expression to the significance of St. Wenceslas for the Czech nation—expressions which have become national monuments.

Future Important

Perhaps still more important, since it gives an indication of what the future will bring, is the fact that promising young Czech artists betray an unflagging interest in St. Wenceslas as the subject of their paintings and statues, and even the coiner has recently chosen to cast his portrait, again and again, in eternal gold and silver.

When we return to the past and survey the last hundred years, the number of first rate artists devoting themselves to honoring the memory of Bohemia's patron has grown so large that only the most important can be briefly touched upon.

Josef Manes, Vojtech Hynais, Bohuslav Snirch, Josef Myslbek, Frantisek Zenisek, Cenek Vosmik, Mikulas Ales—these are all names of the first importance in Czech painting and sculpture, yet "the good king Wenceslas" is the central figure in many of their masterpieces.

It is noteworthy that their stature as artists is almost in direct relation to their position as propagators of the cult of St. Wenceslas. No less remarkable is the proof that the life and character of the saint had a deep personal meaning for each of these artists—a proof we find in an unusual freedom of treatment for a subject so ancient, so that nothing could be, in a way, less similar than the portrait by Manes, the drawings of Ales and the statues by Myslbek.

Of these the first in historical importance is Manes, father of the renaissance in Czech painting, which occurred about the time of the reawakening of national consciousness in 1848. Perhaps it was no mere coincidence that in this very year he painted St. Wenceslas on the banner of the National Guard of Hradec Kralove.

A Slav Ideal

It is the popular ideal of the saint Manes has caught here, perhaps a typically Slav ideal, glorifying the virtues of kindness, patience and piety. The saint is indeed in armor, bears a sword and wears a crown, but there the suggestion of the ruler and warrior ends. He is primarily the saint and the martyr.

The face is almost that of a boy, so tender and beautiful it is saved from effeminacy only by the firmness of the mouth. The eyes reflect infinite goodness and a holy calm. The head is inclined a little and the attitude of the whole figure suggests a saintly compassion.

The powerful realism of the sculptor Myslbek, who between the years 1888 and 1898 made five attempts to convey his sense of the saint's significance in works mainly of heroic proportions, gives us rather the ruler and the victorious warrior.

Perhaps the best known of these works is the equestrian statue of the saint high above St. Wenceslas Square, one of the new glories of ancient Prague. Here St. Wenceslas is no longer a youth but a man in the full pride of his strength, a warrior whose helmet and armor are an integral part of him and whose pennon is held high in token of victory.

Dr. F. X. Harlas says of it with justice, "This metal horse-man before the palace of our National Museum rides as a victor, as a symbol of strength and power—and of a greater future for the Czech nation. In every feature of the noble head, in the attitude of the body, in the rhythm of his gesture is the calm of invincibility, a pledge of a happy future, and every muscle of the beautiful horse ripples with a seething force—that elemental 'Forward!', with which matter is ruled by the spirit."

Art Depicts Saint's Life

Ales has drawn St. Wenceslas so often and in so many different characterizations that it would be difficult to choose any one of his drawings as wholly typical. He himself told a friend he had been drawing, so far as he could remember, since he was four years old, and that the first drawing he could remember was of St. Wenceslas. In his numerous sketches and drawings of the saint produced from that time on we see St. Wenceslas in every stage of youth and manhood to his death.

He gives us the saint as a little boy learning his prayers at the knee of his grandmother, Ludmila; as a youth picking grapes from which altarwine is to be pressed; as a youth, beautiful and strong, and as a ruler, wise and gentle.

Apparently he likes best to draw him in the act of blessing his people, the characteristics of compassion and piety again uppermost. It has been truly said that Ales penetrates to the simple, child-like ideal of St. Václav in the heart of the Czech peasant.

This variety in the conceptions of St. Wenceslas is a proof that for the artist he is still a living force, and we find this true of older Czech art also. From the oldest statue of high artistic merit, dating from about 1370, the work of Peter Parler in the chapel of St. Wenceslas on Hradcany to the newest drawing or painting, each successive artist has refused to remain content with the conception of his predecessor, to follow the hollow conventionalism which has led to the decline of religious art.

In the chapel already mentioned, which was also the work

of Parler, we find likewise a great cycle of mural paintings dating from the sixteenth century, which portrays incidents in the life of the saint and the legends about him which had already sprung up in great numbers. An unknown German master decorated the chapel walls with woodcarvings about the year 1520 and not long after there was placed in it a bronze statue of the saint cast in 1532 in Nuremberg by Hans Vischer.

Inspiration To Art

And so the cult continues down the centuries to our own time, interrupted only momentarily even by the Hussite wars, and gaining in strength toward the end of the seventeenth century when Karel Skreta, known as the father of Czech painting, and his followers and later Petr Brandl found in the spiritual life of the saint, the heroism of the warrior and the tragic death of the martyr inspiration for their art.

The cult outlasted even the production of thousands of statues in the workshops of the eighteenth century stone-cutters and wood-carvers, who made no pretensions to art, and began to show itself in full force again at the beginning of the following century, perhaps most obviously in the work of the president of the Prague Academy, Frantisek Tkadlik.

The romantic movement of that period found a wealth of material in the life of the saint and had not exhausted it when Manes gave an awakened people what was to become a sacred symbol not only of glories vanished and gone but also of a new national greatness to come.

And perhaps herein we may find the reason for the extraordinary fascination which the figure of St. Wenceslas has for a thousand years exercised on the Czech artist. Nowhere better than in the ancient legend that he is to reappear at the head of his knights to aid his country in her hour of greatest need, do we find expressed the profound conviction of these artists that St. Wenceslas remains the living symbol of the realization of the dreams, hopes, and ideals of the Czech nation.

CHARLES HEITZMAN.