

Readings: *1 Corinthians 4: 1 – 5; Psalm 110; Matthew 24: 42 – 46.*

Wulstan was born about AD 1009 in the village of Long Itchington in Worcestershire. This was in the reign of Ethelred (known as ‘the Unready’), and shortly before the invasions which led to the Danish Canute becoming king of England. Wulstan’s parents lost their lands: they joined religious communities, and he became a Benedictine monk, eventually returning to his native county, being ordained to the priesthood, and joining the cathedral monastery.

In 1042, the Danish claimants to the throne of England having died out, Edward (whom we know as ‘the Confessor’), a successor of the Anglo-Saxon royal family, was anointed as king. He had been brought up in Normandy and realised that the English Church was isolated and in need of reform. In 1062, on the recommendation of papal legates, he appointed Wulstan as bishop of Worcester, which entailed being also head of the cathedral monastery

Wulstan was a model bishop and abbot. He is the first English bishop who we know conducted regular visitations of his large diocese, which included parts of Gloucestershire and Warwickshire. He encouraged the building of new churches and supervised the rebuilding of the cathedral – only the crypt of this rebuilding remains.

Edward the Confessor died early in 1066, and the reign of his successor, Harald, ended at the battle of Hastings. From now on the Normans took control of England. This control included the systematic replacement of Anglo-Saxon bishops by Normans. Wulstan was the only English-born bishop to survive for any length of time. He became a loyal supporter of Lanfanc, the new archbishop of Canterbury, in his reforms of the Church, and also of the Norman kings, defending the castle in Worcester against rebel barons and Welsh invaders. Like many monastic bishops he tried to enforce the celibacy of the clergy, but allowed those already married to remain so, One of his greatest achievements was the suppression of the Bristol-based trade in slaves. He was also recognised for his generosity to the poor – of whom there were many after the Conquest – and for his own simple lifestyle.

He died in 1095, after a long ministry in which he had worked for peace and reform in Church and Kingdom. He was buried in his cathedral and canonised in 1203.