

WORKSHEET 2

Aidan and King Oswin

King Oswin was handsome, tall, well-spoken and polite; he was generous to everyone, be they rich or poor. Everyone liked him for who he was and for what he did, and many came to his castle to serve him. Perhaps the most amazing thing about this king was his lack of pride. Here's just one example.

Oswin had given a beautiful horse to Bishop Aidan, to use either in crossing rivers or for any other important journeys - although Aidan preferred to travel on foot. Some short time afterwards, a poor man met the Bishop on the road and asked him for money. Aidan immediately dismounted and ordered that the horse, with all its royal trappings, be given to the beggar; for he was very compassionate and a great friend to the poor.

Naturally, the king heard about this. When they were going into dinner, he said to Aidan, 'What did you mean, my lord Bishop, by giving the poor man that royal horse, which was meant for your own use? Don't we have other horses or things good enough to give to the poor? I chose that horse especially for you!'

Straight away, Aidan answered, 'Your Majesty, are you saying that your horse, a child of a mare, is more dear to you than that child of God?'

With that, they went into dinner and the Bishop sat in his place. But the king (who had just come in from hunting) stood warming himself, with his attendants, at the fire. All of a sudden, calling to mind what the Bishop had said to him, he took off his sword, gave it to a servant, then hastened towards the Bishop and knelt at his feet. 'Forgive me' he said. 'From this time forward, I won't mention it again. And I won't complain about how much of our money you give away to the children of God.'

Aidan, deeply touched at these words, lifted the king to his feet, saying that they were still friends and please would the king sit down with him to eat together? The king did so, but as the meal progressed, one of Aidan's Irish monks noticed there were tears in his eyes. Whispering in Gaelic (which no one else there could understand), the monk asked if anything was wrong. Replying in Gaelic, Aidan said, 'This king's not long for this world. I've never met one so humble, so lacking in pride. A man like him won't last long on the throne. The people of this land don't appreciate him for who he is. They don't deserve him.'

(Adapted from *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book 3, Chapter 14)

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