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THE LIFE OF SAINT WINEFRIDE, VIRGIN AND MARTYR.

I

In the western district of Great Britain there is a certain province called Wales, bordered on one side by the territories of the kingdom of Anglia and, on the other side, by the Ocean sea. This land was once inhabited by holy people of many diverse merits and even to this day, it is much honoured because of their countless prerogatives. From their number, a certain illustrious saint still remains eminent, Beuno by name, a most excellent man and chief among that entire multitude of saints. And so when he had first disdained his father's land and scorning the glory of the world and spurning its pernicious enticements, he fled as a pauper and became a monk, living the life of a perfect man in Christ. After he had built churches in various places and appointed brothers to serve God in them, he was urged on by a divine utterance and went elsewhere to seek a dwelling shown beforehand to him by God. With the Holy Spirit truly guiding him and directing his steps for the benefit of many, he came to the manor of a certain great and very powerful man by the name of Teuyth, who was the son of a mighty, excellent chieftain, Eylud by name, one second only to the king. Teuyth disdained to allow anything inconsistent with his own lineage or which might dishonour so great a family, but he followed the nobleness of his family with upright morals and showed himself to be outstanding in every grace.

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Thus when the venerable man, Beuno, had come to him, he was received by him kindly enough and reverently. Not delaying for long what he was pondering in his mind to disclose, and wishing to make

known the reason for his coming, when he had been summoned privately, Beuno said: "Lord, subject to a heavenly inspiration, I have been sent to you. For although up to now I have lived in diverse places and found dwellings suited to my plan and sufficiently agreeable to my purpose, yet nowhere has my spirit been able to rest, with the Spirit of the Lord secretly admonishing me to look for another place. Hence, with those dwellings left behind which to me were very pleasing, to you have I come, not knowing why Divine Providence which presages future events has directed me here. Indeed, I think that it has not happened by chance or without a reason for the certain mystery, since I have believed without hesitation that all things are done by the will of God alone, and the plans of man are always carried out under God's direction. Therefore, if you give assent to my wishes, it will be of importance to your care for yourself to make my coming work for your salvation, and to direct your thoughts patiently to my requests, and to devote the understanding of your mind effectively to them. And so I pray that you consign to God and to me a part of the property distributed to you by lawful inheritance from your ancestors so that I might there build a church, in it to serve God and to offer prayers every day for your salvation.

3

Then, Teuyth, who had now decided to submit with his whole heart to the will of Beuno, since he judged him to be a man worthy of praise and one to be held in reverence, answered him in words of this kind: "It is right indeed to grant to this man a part of these lands which were bestowed upon us by God, and to return acceptable thanks according to our capacity for His favours to us. For you, who seek from me that which I much rejoice to give and which I am not unaware accrues to my own good, make yourself pleasing to me. Therefore, come and take what you ask, namely this country estate, free and clear and

exempt from all which pertains to me or my successors, from this day forward transferred to the service of God alone. And since I have an only daughter in whom rests almost the whole of my joy and my hope of posterity, entrusting her to you, I pray that you intercede with the Lord for her so that He might incline her will to His own and her manner of life to my honour, and He might increase my joy from her." Saying these words, he handed over to the blessed man that manor on which to build a church and construct dwellings for the servants of God to stay therein. In fact, transferring all his own goods to another place, he fixed his abode opposite, from which place at every hour of the day he could watch the dwellings of the holy man. Thus in a short time the holy man had conquered the spirit of Teuyth, so that if ever he was torn away from necessary conversation, it seemed to him agreeable and pleasing to direct his sight to that place to which he inclined with the desire of his mind, and to visit with his bodily vision the place where he dwelt in the devotion of his soul.

4

Indeed, when the saint attended to constructing his church, he sometimes put his own hands to the task, always sufficiently managing the expenses and hastening the work by his own toil and industry. Sometimes when the blessed man would celebrate the divine mysteries, Teuyth was present with his wife and daughter, Winefride by name. Moreover, if ever the holy man was revealing the precepts of God to the people, Teuyth placed the aforementioned maiden at the feet of the man of God, admonishing her to pay attention wisely to all of them, and to receive with an open heart what was being said by him. God, foreknowing future events, did not allow this to happen in vain. For the maiden, about to become a temple of God, received with ardent longing what she heard with her ears and stored it in her tenacious memory, soon to show in her works what then she was

heaping up in her mind. Often, too, when leave had been asked and obtained from her parents, she came to the man of God, drinking in with a thirsty heart the words which were brought forth from his mellifluous mouth. And although she was loved tenderly by her parents, and the hope of increasing their offspring and the succession of their posterity depended on her alone, yet they considered it a pleasing thing that she was glad to visit the holy man, wishing her to be taught by his discourses to renounce every impure union and to keep herself undefiled for marriage. She, moreover, through the mercy of God inwardly inspiring her, increased daily in goodness and advanced in wisdom, her soul fervently inflamed by the Holy Spirit. Then she determined to renounce utterly every man, and she intended to long for the embraces of God alone, but she was afraid for this to become known to her parents. She believed that it would not be right for her to displease them, but she understood that it was salvific to be united entirely to the true God. She knew the will of her parents in this matter to be harmonious and consistent, so that, lawfully given in marriage to a man, she might keep up the propagation of their offspring; but yet, she believed surely that it would be much better to offer herself as a pure virgin to Christ.

5

Therefore in this spiritual struggle, the maiden's mind was distracted by much tortuous turning, on this side by fear of her parents drawing her away from her intention, on that side by love of God driving her to carry out quickly what she had conceived in her mind. She had been taught by her master to place trust in the words of the Lord, her teacher, to renounce her father and mother, and to follow Christ, but her tender, immature age was an impediment. Yet she decided and firmly fixed in her mind to do that at last, if she could not otherwise gain what she intended. However, she considered it proper first to

address her parents through the blessed man and, with the grace of God helping, to make them agree with her. Thus, coming to him, she found him devoting himself to his accustomed prayer, and boldly rushing forth into his presence, she made him aware of her secret. She said: "I want it to be clear to you how much the seeds of the divine word poured out for me from your mouth have increased their yield in me. I have chosen to reject all the excess of the world, and I have determined to preserve my virginity intact and undefiled in honour of the heavenly bridegroom, and this, O most holy Father, I beg that you obtain for me from my parents by your aid."

6

Hearing these words, the saint, moved by her piety and rejoicing that now the divine seed was sprouting in her, said that he would eagerly address her parents and bring about as best he could that which she asked. This was very easy to do and not difficult to obtain, not only because the parents of this maiden had placed themselves entirely under the protection of him who was brought in to intercede, but also because the fullness of divine nectar had imbued their spirits, by which they strongly wished all men to be inebriated, especially the soul of their daughter. Therefore, when they had learned the ardent wish of the daughter from the man of God, drenched by tears, they blessed God and freely granted what was requested, invoking divine assistance for her. Thus, with the burden set aside by which they were greatly weighed down, they divided the wealth of their possessions in various ways to the poor, administering aid to the widows and orphans, and being carefully attentive to the servant of God. And since they saw their daughter willing to be given in marriage to no one except the Son of God, gathering all the things which they were keeping to be bestowed on him if she were to wed an earthly husband, they spent these on divine services. Also, freed from the cares oppress-

ing them so much up to then, they subjected themselves entirely to the precepts of God, following unswervingly the way of justice.

7

Indeed, when the girl had obtained her earnest wish, she was moved by great joy, and, exulting in the Holy Spirit, she sometimes sat as a votary at the feet of the blessed man, drinking in with a thirsty heart the words about the glory of her betrothed which flowed from his mouth. And when freedom was granted her to use her own authority, with a full heart she hastened on the path of God's commandments, always advancing forward and leaving entirely what was behind. For love of Him to Whom she had devoted herself, she admitted nothing earthly into herself, longing with the prophet for One Alone, namely, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of her life. Now she did not await the arrival of her parents at church, but sometimes making her way there hurriedly herself, she attended the divine mysteries; moreover, she often kept watch in the church at night. Sometimes even besetting the holy man, she urged him to make a sermon and to discuss the ways and the life of her betrothed. In fact, although entirely inflamed by longing for Him, she then had some joy when she heard him speak of the excellence, the glory and the power of her Friend. Refreshment of this kind surpassed for her every enjoyment of earthly possessions and in her heart, she kept the unfailing delight of spiritual enjoyment. And although she was young in age, yet she was mature in morals and venerable at heart, having a spirit which despised all passionate desire. Certainly, whatever of consummate virtue it is fitting for a man to have was found abundantly enough in her, and the fullness of divine grace had poured the whole sufficiently into her. In outward appearances also, she had received much favour from God, for she was very fair of face and affable in speech and very seemly in her whole body. For this reason, she was not able to avoid always the

subtlety of the cunning ambusher, for from this an occasion arose when she was forced to do battle with the Enemy of the human race. For since she was very zealously watchful in the exercises that concern salvation, the devil, seeing that many losses of his power might occur through her and that his strength could be weakened in that country, began to rise up wholly against her and to exert his might. He did not cease until he thought that he had defeated her and that she could not harm him further. The beginning of this was as follows.

8

After the blessed Beuno had finished the building of his church with God's help and had consecrated it to God, the neighbouring people used to come often to it, but almost every day the parents of the aforementioned maiden came there to hear what were the words of God. Moreover, it happened on a certain Sunday, with all the people proceeding to church, that the parents of the maiden also went there so that they might be present at the preaching of the holy man and at the celebration of Mass. However, the maiden, their daughter, perhaps having suffered some ailment, was compelled of necessity to remain at home alone. Behold, a certain youth named Caradoc, the son of King Alan, on entering the house came upon the maiden sitting alone near the hearth. When she saw the king's son, she arose immediately, asking humbly what his purpose was. Indeed, when he inquired where her father had gone and said that he wanted very much to speak with him, the girl responded and said: "Wishing to be present at the divine mysteries, my father has gone to church, and so if he is needed by you, you must wait a little for him to return here." Saying these words with an innocent mind, she suspected no guile or subtlety or any trick. However, in fact, the incentives of lust prompted him and titillated his mind; completely unrestrained, he flew headlong to satisfy this lust, for when the girl had said that he must wait for

her father, the youth answered: "I shall patiently await his arrival if you, meanwhile, become my friend and submit to my desire. You know that I am the son of a king, full of riches and many honours; I shall enrich you abundantly if you are willing to agree to my request." Indeed, knowing that he was speaking about copulation, with downcast look and blushing with shame, she pretended that she was indeed chagrined because he had found her unkempt and unadorned. Then she said to him: "Since you, born of royal stock, will soon be a king, God willing, I do not doubt that I should be richly filled with worldly happiness joined in marriage to you. However, be patient a little while until my father arrives, and I, meanwhile, will go into my bedroom and shall return to you quickly." Saying these words, she was really seeking only to be separated from him for an hour. In fact, she saw that he was a very wretched man, inflamed by unfortunate lust, mortally tormented by love of her, and that he had become almost frantic. She also knew that this dangerous enemy was made more insane by her parents' absence, and so she intended to be removed immediately from his grasp by any pretext. In the end he allowed her to go to her room, expecting that she would return to him without delay and more acceptably adorned with seemlier attire. Then she arose and entered her bedroom; without lingering, she went out through the door of her room on the other side, and with swift flight made her way toward the church. For there she thought she would be protected and defended, if not by his fear of God, at least by the crowd of people.

9

This flight soon was known to the unfortunate youth, who immediately became enraged and filled with violent anger because she fled so as not to be united to him; grasping his sword, he swiftly began to pursue her. And since a little distance separated her father's house from the church, he caught up to her with little effort. He first looked

at her with a savage expression and then addressed her with these words: "Once I loved you and wanted to embrace you. Now you flee one who comes to you and despise one who seeks you. Then, know for certain that either you will be united voluntarily to me right away, or you will end your life without delay when your head has been cut off by this sword."

The maiden turned her eyes toward the church and anxiously watched if anyone might come from there who would bring her aid, but no one came forth straightaway. Then she turned to the youth and said: "Joined in matrimony to the son of the eternal king and judge of all men, I can accept no other. And lest I detain you longer, I shall admit no one except him while I live, for this could not happen without affront to him. Therefore, draw your sword, put forth your strength, readily use any ferocity you please. Be certain that neither your terrors nor enticements nor promises nor threats can tear me away from the sweetness of that love to whose embraces I am already bound and to whose devotion I am joined." When the impure youth heard himself so defied, he was unable to bear his lust and, at the same time, believing that she could not be weakened and that he could have no peace while the maiden lived, he cut off her head with his drawn sword. As soon as the head of the maiden fell to the ground, a most clear spring burst forth in that very spot and spread itself copiously, offering health to many sick people through the merits of the holy maiden, which even today has not ceased to flow. Since he had seized the maiden near the door of the church and there had severed her head, her body remained outside the church, while the head immediately tumbled into the church, for the church was situated at the foot of a certain slope, and it was on the descent of that mountain that the head of the maiden was cut off, and when it tumbled down, it rolled easily into the church, while her mutilated body remained at the spot where it had first fallen.

In truth, when the head tumbled among the feet of the people who were standing in the church and attending the divine mysteries, everyone present was greatly astonished. They were all filled with great fear and said that since an abominable sin had been committed, it must be harshly punished. While they were denouncing the perpetrator, the girl's parents who had been roused by the excitement of the others, approached to learn more surely the reason. When they saw their lifeless daughter and looked at her severed head in one place and her mutilated body in another, they fell to the ground weeping and, consumed by sorrow and anguish, they uttered a lamentable cry and poured forth their grief in wailing cries. When the great commotion arose in the church with all the people lamenting the maiden's death and with many of them filled with great pity at the bitterness of grief which had overcome her parents, the saint heard the din and suspected strife and he came to the crowd of standers-by. When he saw the maiden whom he had consecrated to God so cruelly slain, he was mournfully distressed. Indeed, the murderer was still standing there arrogantly next to the lifeless body and was cleaning his sword, dripping with the maiden's blood on the grass with all the people looking on. Since he was a king's son, he thought that he had perpetrated so shameful an act with impunity, but also, by admitting such a great outrage, he also showed that he did not fear God at all. The saint bore with displeasure his arrogance and hardness of heart and his open boasting of the commission of this crime and he approached him, holding held the head of the maiden in his hands. Looking the youth in the face, he began to address him with these words: "O wicked one," he said, "with a murderous crime defiling the nature of your youthful beauty and the lineage of your royal dignity, why does it not grieve you to have admitted so great a crime? You have confounded the peace and polluted the church by your sacrilege,

and impiously provoked God, and yet you are not sorry. Now, moreover, since you have not spared the church nor shown respect for the Lord's day, I beseech my God that you now receive fitting recompense for what you have shamefully committed." When these words had been spoken, the youth instantly fell to the ground and died. And wondrous to say, in the sight of all standing there, the body of the dead youth melted and disappeared and many people affirmed that it had been swallowed up by the gaping earth and had sunk with his soul into the abyss. Indeed, all seeing this were struck with unspeakable fear due to the strangeness of this unaccustomed portent.

Then, often kissing the head of the maiden which he held in his hands, the saint was troubled in spirit and compelled to weep. Afterwards he arranged the head and brought it to the rest of the body and, spreading his cloak over it, he breathed into the nostrils. Then he ordered the parents, who were giving no room to consolation but were lamenting their daughter's death with continuous weeping, to pause in their mourning and to cease from their sorrow. He then approached the altar to celebrate Mass and when this was finished, with all the people turning to him and raising their hopes to God, he went to the lifeless body. There he made a splendid sermon for the people, saying, among other things, that the blessed maiden had made a vow to God but that, prevented by death, she had not had enough time for fulfilling it; and, therefore, prostrating themselves devoutly on the ground, they ought to implore God for her resurrection, knowing that they would receive many blessings through her in the future. This they did with care, and they pitied the girl's untimely death and the parents' wretched misfortune. Thus, after they had prayed a long time, rising from the ground and stretching his hands toward heaven, the blessed man said: "Lord, Jesus Christ, for whose love this maiden spurned earthly things

and desired heavenly ones, in your mercy hear us calling upon You with devout souls, and pour forth upon us the bowels of your compassion, making Yourself now the perfecter of our wishes. And although we are aware that this maiden, having suffered for Your love, now in the bosom of heavenly joy, has no need of our fellowship any longer, yet You, Most Merciful Father, showing Yourself beneficent and ready to hearken to Your sons who pray to You, offer Your assent to their supplications. Therefore, command that the soul of this girl brought back to her body might prove that You have rule and domination over souls just as over bodies so that, by the grace of Your mercy, alive again, she might praise Your name; and after a long span of life, with the interest multiplied on her manner of living, she might return to You, her betrothed, in truth the only Son of God the Father, with Whom and the Holy Spirit, You live and are in glory, God, forever and ever."

12

When all had responded "Amen," the girl arose as if from sleep, and, wiping off her face and cleansing it of dust and sweat, she filled those standing by with astonishment and joy. Henceforth, where her head had first been severed along the neck, and afterward by divine power it had been attached and reunited, a certain very slender whiteness, like a thread, surrounded her neck and covered the place of the cutting. Thereafter, this always remained this way as long as the maiden lived in the body to indicate the severing of her head and the proof of a miracle. They say that from that time, people of that province called her Winefride, when before, as they affirm, she was named Brewa. For what those people call "Wen" in their tongue, they call "candidum" (white) in Latin, and so, on account of the whiteness encircling her neck, she is said to have her name from this. With the particle "Wen" added, and with two letters of her former name shifted

for the sake of euphony, a word is constructed to obtain the name which is called "Winefride." It is even said that after she had departed from this world, she appeared openly to no one at all who did not see her neck encircled by that white mark. By this evidence, she indicates that the sign of her suffering pleases her still, which she shows clearly as often as she manifests herself to anyone.

13

In truth, the place where her blood was shed used to be called Dry Vale originally, but after the severed head of the maiden had touched the ground and, as we said before, a spring of gushing water arose there which flows even to the present day healing all illnesses both among people and among cattle, this very place has taken its name from the name of the girl. For "Fennan Winefride" in their tongue is rendered "Winefride's spring" in ours and "Fennan" signifies "fons" in the Latin language. And since much blood had poured forth from her body lying on the descent of the sloping mountain, stones tinged by its spattering were lying here and there both in the gushing waters of the spring and in the stream or on the edge of both. And, a marvel to say and to hear, those stones spattered with blood still retain that original spattering, as is well known even today to those wanting to know. For they are stained as if by the congealed blood, nor are they wiped clean by the mold of time nor by the constant washing of the water flowing past. In fact, the moss which clings to these same stones smells like incense. It is acclaimed enough and very well known to the inhabitants of that country that the spring still continues in the original way, and the stones in it, as we said before, are found to be stained with blood, clearly manifesting the merits of the maiden and bringing hope to all that this same maiden can aid those calling upon her. Indeed, the people of that province who had not yet known God nor understood His justice, seeing the raising of the maiden from the dead, and seeing

that so clear and evident a miracle had been performed in the flowing forth of the spring and in the spattering of the rocks, prostrated themselves at the feet of blessed Beuno and asked that they be initiated in the mysteries of God. Receiving them with kindly devotion, he purified them with the water of holy baptism and, when they had been instructed by his discourses upon divine precepts, he confirmed them in the service of God.

14

Now we shall take care to tell concisely how, in fact, the blessed maiden Winefride lived after her rising up from the dead, for instance, what manner of life she had, or to what end she came when the course of this present life was finished. When, therefore, she had risen from the dead, as we said before, clinging to the feet of the saintly man for the whole day, she listened with unremitting devotion to his discourses, wishing to be fully instructed about all things which pertain to God. When this had been done and the tenets of church teaching were understood, she ran to the feet of her teacher and resolutely asked to receive the veil. "Since," she said, "this has been granted to me by my parents, and since you know that my soul, despising every worldly excess, longs for the love and acquaintance of God alone, there ought to be no delay, but the solemn obligations of my ardent desire should be followed. Certainly, in no way shall I be able to be dragged from You or pulled away from your feet before, initiated with your blessing into the mysteries of regular discipline, I shall have shown even by my outer appearance that I am of the religious life. Therefore, Holy Father, do not defer for long my ardent desire, but, giving assent to my entreaties, bring it about that I obtain my wish." Then, when her parents had been summoned, the blessed man made known the will and wish of the maiden, and he said that divine grace had first been called upon her, and he announced that he was willing

to satisfy her desire. In fact, with her parents kindly consenting and embracing their daughter's vow with an agreeable disposition, the saint consecrated her in her holy veil before many people and confirmed her fully in the disciplines of the regular way of life. Immediately after the vow of her ardent desire had been fulfilled, undertaking the practice of every virtue and engaging most devoutly in studies of the regular discipline, in a short time she acquired knowledge of the whole order and perfection in its observance. Henceforth, advancing more and more each day, she made the blessed man very glad on account of her great charity.

15

After her parents had been summoned, he made a speech of this kind: "You," he said, "received me here in former times and showed yourselves prepared for and disposed to my requests. Then you also granted this place to be established for the service of God, and you strove to complete it effectually. Now, indeed, since divine blessings abound in your midst, earnestly give heed to the heavenly light poured upon you and your daughter, and, considering carefully the grace with which you are sprinkled, take care to walk vigilantly on the path of salvation shown to you. And since you are now about to be without my presence, because God calls me elsewhere, wisely regard the examples and admonitions of your daughter, knowing most certainly that she will be a model not only for you but, in truth, even for all people." Indeed, when he had turned toward the maiden, he said, "God commands you to succeed to my labours and duties, and to live in these dwellings, and to walk without ceasing on the path of life mentioned before to you by me, and to show the path to be traveled to others. For He orders you to bear the palm of singular merit before Him, and by the example of your martyrdom and your profession of a good life, He has determined that many in this world

should be instructed in His love. Therefore, from now on it will be your place to dwell in, and to gather virgins who will excel in the service of God and who will remain here with you. And you may know one thing for certain: you will not end your life in this place, for when you have spent seven years here serving God in continual fasting of the body and affliction of the soul, it will be necessary for you, urged on by divine providence, to look for another place, with God guiding you and, through you, illuminating the shadows of many hearts. Again, remember this, because your memory will be renowned in this world, and as much as you will have merit with God, many people will bear witness that they have obtained cures for their infirmities through you."

16

And while the blessed maiden was weeping, much saddened over the departure and absence of her teacher, Blessed Beuno took her right hand and led her to the spring which we pointed out above had flowed forth from the place where her severed head had fallen. Stationing her on one stone which then, by chance, was found there, and even today remains in the stream of the spring and is called "Saint Beuno's stone" by the inhabitants of the place, he addressed her once again with these words: "Here," he said, "you still see the traces of your suffering. Behold, those stones spattered by your blood show that you suffered martyrdom for God, and to your everlasting honour and as a memorial for many others, they preserve, as if fresh, that spattering which wet them with your blood. Now, therefore, in a diligent and retentive memory, store away my words, which will come to the notice of many people by your reverent reporting, and which will much benefit some people through the succession of time to come. Understand that three gifts have been given to you by God which will solemnly proclaim the reason for your praise, and which will increase through

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proper veneration the love of your devotion in the minds of future generations. In truth, the first is that these stones drenched by the sprinkling of your blood will not be able to be cleansed through the ages by any washing nor to be washed off by the constant, swift motion of the water, but, always bloodstained, they will be visible as a manifestation of your suffering, with God working such a miracle for the glory of His own majesty and as a triumphant sign of your chastity. Indeed, the second gift is that whoever has suffered some misfortune and sought you and asked to be freed from his illness or oppression through you, will rejoice that he has gotten what he asked for when he has been granted his wish the first or second or surely the third time. Moreover, if it happens that one petitioning you has not obtained what he wanted by the third request, let him know most certainly that he will be deprived of the light of the present life soon, and so through the hidden judgment of God he has at present lost the fruit of his prayer. Yet, let him understand that to have called upon you constantly benefits him for the healing of his soul, and through you something greater is divinely given to him than if he obtained outwardly what he requested. Moreover, the third gift is of this kind: When I shall have departed from you shortly, God will deign to bestow on me a suitable place to stay on the seashore. Although I shall be separated from you by a great distance, yet the Most High commands that I be visited every year by your gifts. Therefore, when you have ready in your hands what you wish to send to me, hurry with your gift to this spring here before you and, whatever it will be, entrusted first to God, place it confidently in the spring. Immediately you will see what you have deposited there carried by divine power from the spring through the stream, and, by the force of the running water, conducted unharmed beneath the great, flowing river. And soon, with the wave of the sea submitting to God's will and offering its service, what you have placed in the spring will be carried to the

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door of my little lodging, carried unharmed over the winding currents of waters, over the swelling, roaring storms of the sea right to my dwelling. With God commanding it, this will also have to happen for all the years that I shall be a sharer in this life. These three gifts, significant of the privilege divinely conferred on you, will be granted to you by God, and while this world lasts, they will be extolled in the reports of many people for the celebration of your memory and the glory of your praise." When these words had been spoken, he led her back to the church, addressing her again in words of this kind: "Behold, this church and the dwellings standing around it, built partly through my toil, partly through the expenses of your parents, I leave to you so that, since I am leaving here, when many virgins have been assembled who will remain with you in the service of God, you might serve God here according to your purpose, never neglecting the good way of life and the examples of living recommended to you by me. And know that in this place there will be a great manifestation of divine power for the benefit of many, and through the example of those remaining here many people will grow in the knowledge of God; they will denounce all the profits of the world so that they might gain Christ. Also, various healings of souls and bodies will be granted here at random to people sick with diverse infirmities; indeed, every age or sex will rejoice that it has attained some remedy in this place. But also I declare that not even brute animals will be lacking in the benefits of this place, with God protecting this dwelling by His merciful might and performing such great signs in it for the celebration of your glory. You, show yourself so truly acceptable to God and make yourself so excellent in all things that in you His holy name might live in glory, and you might become a model of salvation to those who look to you. But now I depart from here to serve God elsewhere according to my custom, and to keep your devotion in sweet remembrance within the recesses of my heart while I live."

Saying these words, he started to go away after he had taken up his staff alone, leaving everything to the blessed maiden and her comrades, all the furniture of his house and whatever God had given to him through the hands of the faithful while he was living there. And so, when all had been commended to God and farewell had been said to all, he departed, content with only one cleric as his companion, and he was turning his eyes ever toward blessed Winefride, his cheeks wet with many tears on account of her bodily absence. Indeed, distraught over his words and his departure, saying that she was left without an adviser, exposed to all the attacks of enemies, and forsaken by the presence and attentiveness of her pastor, she had a face sad with tears and sorrow. Although many people tried with comforting words to soothe her while she was escorting her father for a time as he was leaving from the church, she accepted no consolation at all while she was with him. Truly, not one of her companions walking along the way with her could keep from tears, seeing her tormented by such bitter grief. In fact, enduring her weeping no longer and wishing to put an end to so much lamentation, although he was moved by great pity, the saint was separated from her by his swift pace, after his hand had first been extended and a blessing bestowed. Yet, she followed him with anxious glances, and when he was no longer visible, the maiden returned with her companions to her house. Still, she was by no means able to conceal the bitterness of sorrow which had assailed her on account of the departure of her teacher as long as his memory was fresh.

Moreover, after a little time had passed, returning to herself and calling to mind again the manner of her conversion, and the glory of her suffering, and the sermons of blessed Beuno her teacher, or his prophecies, she set aside all her grief completely, undertaking a

vigorous constancy and immediately, with all the love of her soul, embracing Christ, her betrothed, to Whom she had devoted herself by living chastely; she began to long for Him, to know Him, to sigh for Him with burning desire. Then, gathering the daughters of noblemen to herself, she taught them to love chastity, and with all the enticements of this alluring world rejected, to submit their necks to the light yoke of Christ, and to give themselves up to the service of God through the rule of the monastic life. Some, moreover, observing the severity of that manner of life and the moral seriousness of the life, were goaded by divine grace, and taking up the rule of the monastic order, they asked to be clothed with the holy veil. Carrying out the duties and offices of a good shepherd to them, Blessed Winefride sometimes taught them to be fortified against the ambushes of the deceitful devil by the words of the gospels and the sayings of the holy fathers, and sometimes by the splendid expression of her own discourse she poured divine love into their hearts. Moreover, she did not cease to instruct them with constant admonitions, to direct them wisely toward the precepts of the rule, to be mindful of her way of life and to be dutiful in these things. In truth, she did without ceasing the same things which she taught should be done by those subject to her. Certainly every day she zealously directed them toward fasts and prayers and vigils, and by doing these things herself she showed how the virgins subject to her ought to live; the model of the flock entrusted to her became an example of living rightly. Moreover, reaching in a short time the pinnacle of all virtues, she made it known openly that Christ, the Virtue of God and the Wisdom of God, possessed the fullness of her heart. And indeed, on the one hand, countless powers and frequent miracles clearly manifested this, and on the other hand, doctrines of salvation flowing abundantly from her mouth demonstrated that plainly. Furthermore, the convent of virgins increased exceedingly, with the fragrance of that good order

drawing them to the knowledge of God and pouring the love of the Deity into their hearts. That holy community used to rejoice that such a woman presided over it, one in whom it visibly beheld that all exercises of virtue overflowed, and it recognised that heavenly grace shone copiously in her. Therefore, since she applied herself assiduously to all her practices of the heavenly life, the neighbours all around began to be devout through love of her; moreover, those situated far away were much pleased on account of her good reputation, saying that those to whom she was nearer, either by her way of life or her acquaintance, were steeped in the very great mercy of God. And many displays of powers happened through her in miracles. That fact clearly subjected even more the hearts of fierce men to her devotion, and also compelled the minds of the faithful to show reverence to her, and winning over the favour of all equally, drew it to her. Now it was quite agreeable to everyone to remain in the vicinity, with certain ones very much striving after the delight of the total good and the way of salvation through her, and certain ones truly believing the power of heavenly grace to be in her on account of the favours brought to them outwardly in miracles. And so with all accepting with great veneration and reverence the divine splendour which shone through her far and wide in that district, the virgins subject to her, those to whom it showed itself more brightly, advanced more after that. In fact, seeing her sigh to God with groans each day, and seeing divine utterances come frequently to her, they took up a greater devotion to God and were made ever better.

Truly, when Blessed Winefride was pursuing good works of this kind with perseverance, and through her the heavenly light was shining all around, very often calling to mind the memory of her master's words and precepts, she thought that the day of his departure was drawing

near, namely, the day on which he had departed from her and commanded that a gift be sent to him. Moreover, keeping this in her memory with unceasing earnestness, by her own toil and that of her virgins, she made a chasuble of one single texture to be despatched to the man of God. And so, the day dawning on which that present was to be sent, which is the first of May, the blessed maiden came with many others to the spring in which she was to place her gift according to the command of the man of God. First she took up the chasuble and wrapped it in a white cloth and thus placed it in the middle of the spring, saying that she was directing it to the blessed man, Beuno, through the agency of the spring. And behold - a thing wondrous to say and unbelievable except to a man of faith - that small piece of cloth in which the chasuble was wrapped suffered no injury from the water nor did it experience even the least infusion of water, but remaining altogether dry with the chasuble, it was carried by the rush of the flowing water and conveyed on the great stream. And that whole day and the following night, that gift of the maiden was carried over the waves of the sea; in the morning it was cast upon that shore on which the holy man had built his dwellings. Moreover, when Blessed Beuno went out from the church in the morning, he stood upon the edge of the sea, and he was regarding with admiration how the waters that had first rushed forth then returned to themselves, and with what hidden force they drew the waves to themselves; by chance he spied at a distance on the shore the wrapped cloth. Going nearer, he tried to know with more certainty what that was, and, after he had put his hand to it, lifting it from the sand of the sea and unfolding the wrapped cloth, he found the chasuble, which had no damage to it at all. The cloth, also, which had covered it on the outside appeared dry, just as if it had not touched the water. And indeed, while he was thinking carefully and trying to discern the reason for this discovery, and at the same time wondering at the fact that he could find something not drenched within the watery

strands of soaked sand, the memory of Winefride, the maiden beloved of God, came secretly into his mind. When he had reflected on how he had ordered her to prepare a gift for him every year and to place what was prepared in the spring which flowed into the river, at last he recognised, with the Holy Spirit revealing it to him, that it had been sent by the blessed maiden, conveyed unharmed to him from the blessed maiden over the gulf of the sea. Then humbly giving thanks to God, he freely accepted that gift and placed it in the church to be kept thereafter for his use as well as that of the other servants of God. And he rejoiced exceedingly because the blessed maiden had been mindful of his words, and because her reputation was so excellent that by it nearly the whole district had been illuminated. Moreover, he prayed to the Lord that an increase of virtues be magnified in her, and that whatever was pleasing in His eyes be found in manifold ways in her, and that the consciences of others be inflamed with heavenly devotion through her.

20

Truly, it is clear enough from the outcome that God accepted his prayers and showed to him the hearkening ears of His mercy. For indeed, the practice of the heavenly way of life had advanced in the maiden to such a great extent that the sum of all perfection was found in her, and, like a solitary splendour, she appeared to the people of the whole district, both present and absent, as a model of living and an example of doing good. Also, she had a wondrous, divine power to persuade what she wished, for as often as she received a talent of the divine word entrusted to her to be dispensed to others, so great an ability in speech came to her and so temperate a seriousness in her judgments that her words generally touched all and bound them in devotion to God. Thereafter, nearly all the inhabitants of that country, restrained by her repeated admonitions, abstained from all the things which could hinder their salvation, and with burning eagerness

they directed themselves to the things which they knew to be works of faith and which they saw the blessed maiden or her fellow nuns strive after. Truly, she showed herself to be devoted to everything which Beuno, the blessed man, had said or commanded, certainly neglecting nothing of all which had been enjoined upon her. Indeed, every year on the first of May she sent a gift to her master, while he was alive, in the manner in which we indicated above; and although a great space separated them from each other (for fifty miles or more made up the distance between them), yet in the space of one night, carried over the winding currents of the sea to the door of the monastery, the gift was found in the morning on the sand of the shore. Moreover, for this reason a name was bestowed on the blessed man which is kept as a remembrance even today among the people of Wales, for he is called Beuno Casul Sech, that is, Beuno Dry Chasuble, because the dry chasuble was conveyed to him over the waters, unharmed by the waters. Furthermore, while the maiden observed this manner of sending the gift every year, it happened that blessed Beuno, worn out by old age, went to his heavenly joy, full of virtues and renowned for good works, leaving behind this frail world filled with hardships. Records indicating the manner of his life and his ways, records concerning his life or his passing, and what he did as a youth, or what miracles he performed after death, are still kept in respectful memory. This outstanding memorial is also proclaimed about him, that after death he performed many more miracles than while living.

21

When his death became known to the holy maiden, she honoured him with many tears and prayers, and she ceased to send the aforementioned gift any longer. Moreover, then for the first time saying that she was destitute of all human consolation, she began to be weary of the place in which she lived, and with time passing little by little,

when most of her fellow-nuns had departed from this world, she began to hate the place in which she had dwelt thus far. Mindful of her teacher's words, by which he had indicated that after seven years she ought to look for another place and live there, at the completion of the final year she began to dislike the place and to neglect completely all the various buildings. And since her face was that of a person turning her attention elsewhere, her spirit had no rest while she stayed there. Yet, not until the aforementioned seven years were finished did she have the ability to abandon that dwelling or to go elsewhere. But indeed, when all the years had passed, then having taken control over herself and lifting her mind with every effort toward God, she prayed that He would direct her to a place where she could please herself and profit others; and that He would deign to pour forth His blessings upon that place in which she had first received consolation, so that one who might come there for the sake of prayer or of finding some cure would gain what he asked for when her name had been invoked, with those pleading on his behalf who for love of her had corrected their own actions and habits. Countless peoples released from the infirmities of different diseases in that place bear witness that this request reached the ears of God. Hereafter this will be shown by clear examples, when first we have composed the narrative of this history.

22

Therefore, when the blessed maiden, Winefride, gave herself earnestly to prayer, begging that God's mercy would sustain her and be the guide of her journey, as she was intent upon vigils and prayers on a certain night, a divine utterance of this kind came to her: "With only one maiden with you as your companion, go to Blessed Deifer, who dwells in the place called Botavarrus, and when he has been consulted, you will know what then you are to do or where you are to go." Indeed, that man was great in the sight of God, one who walked in all

commandments and ordinances without complaint. Of him it is recorded that, since he abounded plentifully in the grace of miraculous powers, he caused a spring to burst forth from the earth, and that after it had been blessed by his outstretched hand, he had prayed to God that any sick person who immersed himself in it would return to his own home in possession of his health. Many people who obtained their health there have asserted that this was done. Indeed, although very many miracles accomplished by him are recorded in numerous reports, yet it is pleasing to introduce in particular one performed after his death, since, when that has been considered carefully, it is readily known whose merit it was. Certain thieves going out to commit robbery found two horses in the cemetery of Blessed Deifer; leading them off, they hoped to get away without hindrance. However, the masters of those horses, coming to the cemetery in which they had left them and not finding them there, knew that they had been stolen. They returned to their lodgings, made candles, and, entering the church of the most holy confessor, placed them upon the altar. Since these were not lighted, nor did they have at hand fire with which to light them, they humbly prayed to the saint of God that either he light them with a light sent from Heaven, or that he accept them unlighted with the same zeal as if they were given to him lighted. Indeed, showing that he was attentive to their prayers, the saint lighted their candles with a sudden light when they had been placed before him. For this reason a greater devotion to Saint Deifer increased in them, and the hope of recovering what they had wrongfully lost arose in them. Nor was their expectation deceived, for the aforementioned thieves, after wandering over the entire surrounding district, when about midnight they thought that they had fled far away, eagerly wanting to know where they had come, finally realised that they had arrived at the hedge by which the aforementioned cemetery was encircled. Moved by mighty anguish and knowing that, if caught, they

would not have committed that robbery with impunity, they tried again with reins loosed to flee. But neither was divine power weak then to show the hand of its strength against them, for when they thought that they were far removed, since the light of day had burst forth, they had been led back to the aforementioned place and were forced to dismount from the horses and hold the reins in their hands within the perimeter of the same cemetery. Moreover, the men who had lost the horses had not yet departed from the same place, but, having waited in the church for a while, they believed that some solace would come to them soon through the Lord's saint. Therefore, coming out of the church as day was dawning, they saw that their own horses stood in the churchyard, and the same men who had led them there were holding them. Then, praising God and giving thanks to Saint Deifer, they took their horses, allowing the thieves to depart unpunished. So, from these summaries one can easily infer how much merit was in the holy man to whom Blessed Winefride was commanded to go by the divine utterance.

23

And so, the most holy maiden, entrusting to God her abode and all with whom she had dwelt, began her travels, content with only one maiden as her companion, as she had heard in the divine utterance. Coming to Saint Deifer (it is well known that he was at a distance of about eight miles from the place where she had started out), she was received by him with great kindness. When they had watched in prayer for a long time, they sat together while the maiden explained completely the reason for her coming to him. The holy man responded to her in this way: "I am as yet truly unaware of this divine counsel," he said, "but be patient a while and pass the night here with us. Perhaps the Lord will deign to reveal something to us which might be pleasing to Himself and a summary of your plan." She willingly

assented to this, knowing without a doubt that it had been made known to her from the heavenly response given to her that she would be taught by this same saint what they were to do. Thus, to the saint who was praying throughout that entire night (as he was accustomed to do), a voice came from Heaven saying: "Tell my dearest daughter, the maiden Winefride, to go to the village called Henthlant; there she will obtain in some measure what she earnestly desires, for she will find there a venerable man named Saturnus. Through him she will hear in full what she will do next, for instance, in what place she will dwell for the rest of her life." And so, summoning the maiden to himself in the morning, Saint Deifer kept back nothing of all which he had been divinely taught. Showing her the way by which she ought to proceed to the aforementioned saint, he advised her to go joyfully, telling her that it had been made known to him from Heaven that she would hear openly from that saint what was right for her, and the entire order of what she should do.

24

Indeed, Blessed Winefride rejoiced because, with every doubt removed, she had been led by Blessed Deifer to some certainty, and because she knew that God was taking care of her. Saying farewell to the most holy man, she and her companion undertook their journey to Blessed Saturnus. When she came to him, she was received most kindly by him. In fact, made aware of her whole plan and journey beforehand by a response given to him on this matter from on high, he received the blessed maiden with every sentiment of devotion. Then, he advised that she remain with him that night and on the next day she would be fully instructed concerning all that she required; she agreed and, led first to prayer, she sat down with him, saying that she had come to him at God's command so that by his teaching she might obtain her desire. And so, remaining there that whole night, in the

morning she heard from Blessed Saturnus words of this kind: "There is a certain place called Witheriac, a place filled with the relics of many saints; it was chosen by God on account of their venerable manner of living, and it is held in very great awe by all the people. God commands you to visit this place, and while you are alive to dwell there in person and to instruct the souls of others by your example. A certain abbot named Elerius is there, a man of many virtues. Continual lamentation and persistent prayer have so rendered him free and purified of all secular cares that, now intent entirely on things of Heaven, he savours nothing earthly; he aspires to nothing at all of worldly pleasure. I have been admonished by a divine command to send you to him, and, moreover, to tell you that there you will find whatever is necessary in the present life to satisfy a soul longing for the things of Heaven. For in that place are virgins consecrated to God, from the very beginnings of their childhood observing celibacy in the profession of the religious life and exerting themselves in their purpose with diligent devotion; to a certain degree they must be made better, God willing, by your instruction and example. For although they keep themselves in the service of Christ by ever-watchful observance, yet by your coming they will be made more devout, and a greater splendour of divinity will shine upon them."

25

When she had heard about the virgins' manner of living, Winefride, alluding much to their praise, confessed that she was long since bound by the same ardent desire, and that she wished most gladly to embrace the name of virginity with them; moreover, she asked that a guide for the way be provided for her as quickly as possible. Indeed, assigning his own deacon to the blessed maiden and through him sending her to Blessed Elerius, Saint Saturnus began himself to lead her a little way. And when he had told her many things about the loveliness of

the place to which she was going while they were speaking, at last, wishing to depart from her, he imparted the blessing requested of him. Then, asking that many good things be granted to her by God, the saint returned to his own home, and she made her way to where she was going. Knowing of her arrival beforehand through the Holy Spirit, the saintly man quickly set out to meet her, and he received that most faithful worshipper of God as was fitting; the deacon who had come with her told everything which had been divinely intimated to his teacher, and how she had been sent to that place by the admonition of God. When she had first been properly greeted and honoured with due respect, he led her into the church to pray; when the prayer was finished, the saint embraced the maiden and exhorted her to be of steadfast spirit. Calling her afterwards to a private meeting, he inquired about what she conceived in her mind and what she had resolved to do: "For," he said, "although the whole manner of your life has been made known to my humble self from on high - how you were initiated into the divine mysteries; in what way you obtained the glory of martyrdom by the severing of your head; what are the marks of your suffering and your blood poured out - yet, I wish to be taught from your own mouth the reason which compels you to take up the hardship of so great a journey." The maiden responded to him thus: "The One who deigned to reveal to you what you have just now made known has not left you entirely unknowing, I think, concerning the things which I am turning over in my mind, or why I have come to this place. For as it was possible for you to reveal what had happened to me in the past, so it was equally possible to show plainly what will befall me in the future. Therefore, receive me, sent to you by God, and so arrange my way of life now as was shown to you before by heavenly utterance." Then the holy man decided to defer the explanation of this plan for that night which was near at hand, and he humbly entreated her to bear it patiently.

And so while Saint Elerius devoted himself to prayer through the whole night, and Blessed Winefride likewise was intent with ever-watchful constancy upon her prayers, certainty in this matter was made evident to the holy confessor as he rested a little around daybreak. Made very glad by this, he came to the maiden in the morning, and, rushing to her embrace, he advised her to rejoice and to be free from care thereafter. Then, indeed, taking her hand, he led her into the convent of virgins which, as we have said before, was renowned in that place; he addressed them with these words: "Dearest Daughters, be very attentive with your minds, for it is important to make known to you with how great a splendour the Divine Mercy has deigned to shine upon you with compassion. Behold, It has determined to send this maiden consecrated to It to remain with you and to dwell with you, so that by observing her life you will be made more devoted in God's service by her example, and a reward will be given to her in Heaven because of your improvement. This is that maiden, Winefride, whose great fame flew to your ears some time ago: in order not to suffer the loss of her chastity, she scorned the attacks of her pursuers together with the enticements of flatterers, and to the last she chose to die willingly by decapitation for the safeguarding of her virginity. This is the one, I say, whose signs of triumph shine far and wide through the Church; because of her titles of honour that whole district boasts that it is granted a great good. She alone is not unaware that she will receive from God the palm of martyrdom and of outstanding accomplishment. Therefore, to you she has come, to remain with you and to await the day of her death, she who has already claimed Heaven by her merits, and whose place of retribution among the blessed martyrs is secured. And so, be exceedingly glad at her coming and devoutly embrace the heavenly treasure dwelling among you, carefully paying attention to her works and imitating her

with every effort. Indeed, the Most High has sent her here to this place so that you, while observing her, might store up your merits with hers in Heaven, and so that this place might be sprinkled with much fame on account of her while this world endures." After these words, he turned to one woman (who was his own mother and the superior for the other nuns) and said: "To you, O Dearest Mother, I especially entrust the care of this maiden dear to God. Thus, you follow in her footsteps, you imitate her works, you pursue with earnest skill the care of all things which pertain to her or whatever you know pleases Him. Let it be known to you and to the others sitting in our presence that this blessed maiden has been sent to this place by divine utterance; for this reason, you ought to have greater devotion around her, and you ought not to be unaware of how great a care this place is in the sight of God." When these words had been spoken, the confessor departed, and Blessed Winefride remained to pass her life from then on with the handmaidens of God.

27

And then, indeed, she hastened to seize the summit of all religious life, and she stood steadfastly on the peak of all virtues, as if thus far she had been utterly a stranger to this kind of sanctity. And since the first prophetic signs of her manner of life had been revealed to the holy virgins by the blessed man, she entered upon every path of salvation with such burning devotion, as if then for the first time she had begun to be converted to God. In her there was continual abstinence and guarding of her goodness, and persevering prayer for holiness, and humble living. In her the other virgins received an example of patience and obedience, and they made her a leader for themselves in all things which pertained to salvation. In her they found copiously all things which were of integrity and virtue. Thus, they showed her great respect. In fact, the one who was their superior (Theonia was her

name), that is to say, the mother of Elerius, the holy confessor, loved her with earnest affection, and with Winefride's advice she managed the care of herself as well as the other maidens entrusted to her. Indeed, she revered the watchful constancy in her, and she marveled at her continuous abstinence, and she cherished in her the perseverance with sweet joy in all virtues. Very often, also, while discussing with her their longings for the heavenly kingdom, she caused tears to flow copiously from Winefride's eyes, and she wept as well, for she was truly a woman of great dignity and extraordinary holiness, and one zealously attentive to all works of charity and mercy. Although she loved all the maidens with inestimable devotion, yet she received Saint Winefride with joyful affection, and she paid much attention to her venerableness. To be sure, Saint Elerius, who served the Lord separately with his brothers and fellow-disciples in simplicity of heart and with great affliction of spirit, sometimes came to her and set her before the others to be imitated. Moreover, very often while talking with her about the hidden things of Heaven, sometimes even about the mysteries of the Church, he found her to be overflowing abundantly concerning things which pertain to God, and to be rich in intelligent understanding of the outward necessities of life. Thus he would return to his own brothers, admiring in her both the profusion of outward knowledge and the fullness of divine grace within. And he could not long conceal this from the people nearby, from which that place in a short time gained great renown and was held in great respect. In fact, faithful people from everywhere used to hasten there in crowds wishing to see the maiden formerly decapitated for love of Christ, but brought to life again by the charitable deed of a certain saint, crowds gloriously proclaiming that the place in which she dwelt was worthy of the highest reverence. In truth, to certain ones the sight of her alone was enough, and speaking to her; however, some who acted more importunately asked humbly that

the place of the cutting on the maiden's neck be shown to them. She feared to resist their requests, lest their devotion be lessened on that account, and lest that be imputed to pride in her. Those who saw on her neck the skin covering over the place of the cutting growing white with a wondrous colour could not refrain from tears. Blessing God in His mighty works and filled with very great wonder, they returned to their own places.

28

In fact, on a certain day Blessed Elerius entered the nuns' cloister to visit the holy maiden, Winefride, and to discuss with her the things of the Lord. Moreover, while they were speaking to each other at length, by chance the conversation came to the memory of death. Then, since an occasion was found for bringing forth what he very often reflected on in his mind, the saint said: "I rejoice that God has sent you to this place to consign my body to its burial and to keep the memory of me after my death. For I have often prayed that this be granted to me by God, namely, that someone might send here one of his servants or handmaidens who would bury me and, dwelling in this place after me, would make it famous." To him the blessed maiden replied thus: "Indeed, it will not be so, nor so has it been preordained by God. For it is necessary that you first commit to the earth your mother, my superior, while I survive and stay with you, and at last, after the course of some years, to bury my body. Then, full of days, you will finish your life in peace and, conveyed to your fathers, you will find in the heavenly kingdom what you have stored there to be preserved." When he had heard these words, the holy confessor departed. Moreover, it was soon apparent that she had spoken a true prophecy, for after a short span of time Blessed Theonia was seized by a serious illness, and she began to be beset by the stings of death now coming upon her. When her daughters, that is to say the virgins who were

under her discipline, recognised her swift departure, they began to languish with much weeping and sorrow. Indeed, they were lamenting exceedingly because they were losing a mother who had nourished them and reared them in the service of God and taught them the divine mysteries. Comforting them with expressions of solace, she used to say that mournful words ought to be uttered at the time when worse succeeds better and when divine laws perish through evil successors; truly, when better succeeds good and the things which are God's are carried to an ever-better state, then grief and desolation should not be allowed, but rather it is the duty of a man who possesses a good habit of mind to accept with a glad heart, with spiritual joy, the improvement sent from on high. "And you," she said, "ought therefore to bear my death patiently, since you will have with you this blessed maiden, Winefride, in whom you can sufficiently find all that pertains to doctrine or to a model of salvation. Observe her with your inner eyes and imitate her with the desire of your soul. Direct your steps to her as if to a singular star, and devote the care of all your deeds to her, knowing without a doubt that God is your helper in all things if you give willing assent to the counsels of that maiden." After these words, she received the life-giving communion of the Lord's body and blood from her son, namely the holy confessor, Elerius, and departing instantly from this world, she gave up her spirit into the hands of the holy angels.

29

After she had been properly laid to rest, as was fitting for so great a woman, and buried with the great lamentation and weeping of all, the holy man entrusted the custody and care of the other virgins to Blessed Winefride. Although she strove much to resist his command, yet fearing God's judgment if she tried to withstand longer, finally she consented and added the care of the others to her own burden. Now,

indeed, it is not possible to report with how great a determination of total abstinence she took these austerities upon herself, what torments or how great the penalties she imposed on her own body, of how much sparingness or strictness were in her. In truth, (so that I might explain everything fully), she left absolutely nothing untried which she knew pertained to her own salvation or lead to an example and advantage for others. Thus, established in these ways, she was loved with sincere affection by all; both strangers and members of her own household showed honour to her and respectfully did homage to her. In fact, Blessed Elerius and other very great men who lived in Wales, seeing such great perfection in the maiden, deferred much to her and revered her. All the powerful men and nobles of the country embraced her with sweet devotion and, seeing her kind way of life, they were very much edified. Also, many men of lesser rank, coming to her and observing the modesty of her appearance, and receiving great edification from her sermons, thereafter were made more disposed to the service of God. But even robbers and usurpers of others' property were remorseful at heart after they had seen the appearance of her countenance and heard her sermons. And certain of these were then made milder; indeed, some, ceasing their robberies altogether, were converted to the Lord, doing public penance for their crimes. And (that I might include everything precisely), no age, no sex, likewise no man of any business within that country seemed left who did not have some benefit from the good deeds of this maiden. Then Saint Elerius, the friend of God, was unutterably glad, and sometimes he preached to the people about her, saying, among other things, that God had sent her to that same country for the enlightening of the faithful people, and that the power of the Divinity dwelt in her. Many people knew this clearly enough, for countless miracles and cures of the sick granted through her bore powerful witness that she had the power of divinity. Indeed, whoever came to her sick left in good

condition after his health had been recovered. The one who came sad went away rejoicing; one who came oppressed at heart by any trouble or burdened by some outward cause befalling him returned to his own place cheerful, immediately freed from the cares weighing him down, and having gained his wish. Certainly, she harmed no one, but in some way benefitted all commonly and individuals particularly. Indeed, whoever dwelt in the area of that estate and was beset by misfortunes of body or soul quickly obtained his desired remedy through her. She kept herself so apart from all worldly entanglements that she considered herself impure if she allowed for her own use or among the necessities of her associates even the smallest of all the things which belong to the pomp of this world. She also exercised temperance in her admiration of all things. She remained zealous in the care of the virgins subject to her; she made them cautious and sufficiently learned to avoid even the subtleties of the cunning Foe. Truly, in her sermons and constant prayers she defended them from the enemy of the human race and the attacker of the Lord's law by tirelessly warning that they be circumspect in all their actions, and that they have a constant concern for their own salvation.

Thus, during this time, after Winefride, the maiden beloved of God, had led a life acceptable to the King on high in its devoted service, it happened that, behold, the Lord Jesus, wishing to take up His handmaid from the toilsome service of this life to the rest of everlasting happiness, indicated to her on a certain night as she was devoting herself to prayers in the chapel that the day of her death was very near. As soon as she sensed that she had been called, she knew immediately that she had been visited by the grace of God, and with an exultant spirit she began to prepare herself for the joys of the everlasting kingdom. Then on successive nights she used to spend the night

praying in church, and in the days she persisted with total effort in every virtue, leaving nothing undone, according to her strength, of all which she had learned should be done. Moreover, to the virgins staying with her she announced that her departure was to occur soon. When they heard this, the handmaids of God began to be moved by sorrow and tormented by insoluble grief. Trying to comfort them with consolations, the blessed maiden used to say that they ought not to be sad on account of bodily separation, since she was passing from corruption to incorruption, from miseries to joys; they ought rather to be very glad and to rejoice with her because she was going to such a Lord, with Whom she could intercede for them and protect them as much as possible. She even exhorted them to beware of the cunning of the Enemy who steals deceitfully, teaching them that there are many-shaped subtleties in his slyness; she exhorted them especially to depend on her examples and to show themselves such that they might deserve to be aided by her intercessions. Moreover, as soon as that rumour was brought to the attention of Blessed Elerius, he was particularly distressed by exceedingly great sorrows over the departure of the maiden dear to him. In fact, knowing that she had been divinely given a gift of special grace, he wished with very great piety that she remain with him while he sojourned in the body. Now, moreover, although she was passing from misfortune and hardships to joy lasting without end, with himself left behind amidst the disorders of the world, he used to say with regret that he was losing the solace of his earthly sojourn. Yet, bringing himself often into her presence and engaging in conversations, as if in offering himself to her, he carried out the duties and habits of a good shepherd, by having concern for her in all things and by carefully supplying what he knew would be beneficial to her.

Meanwhile, the blessed maiden began to be troubled by serious internal pain. When her illness was strong and increasing daily, she knew that she was bound by the incitements of her death. Then, turning her attention to God with her whole strength, she prayed that He have mercy on her, and that He be the faithful overseer and guardian of her soul so that she would not become the plunder of the most wicked Plunderer. Then, when Elerius, the holy confessor, had been called to her, she fortified herself with the last sacrament of the Lord's body and blood. In truth, seeing the virgins, her companions, afflicted with very great sorrow on account of her sickness, she encouraged them with words of comfort, saying, "Do not, Daughters, do not be troubled with excessive sadness on account of my death, since by the mercy of God I shall come to the highest immutable good when the present misery has been left behind. Now I rejoice that I rejected an earthly spouse, that inflamed by love of God alone I trampled upon all the world's pleasures, or that I decided to have nothing of my own in this world. And so, be assured that now I shall come to Him Whom I have preferred to all things, and in comparison to Whom I have judged all worldly goods to be as dung. Know, I say, that I shall enjoy the sight of Him forever, for love of Whom I made myself a detriment, and I despised all the delights of the flesh. Therefore, with loving devotion embrace so good and great a Lord, with your entire effort rely on the examples of salvation proposed to you and made clear to you, and strive to keep your covenant with the heavenly spouse to Whom you promised to guard your faith and your chastity. For with His help alone you can await this day with sure hope; you can avoid the ambushes of your enemies and have everlasting peace. In fact, consider trivial and momentary whatever presents itself to your eyes of flesh. Indeed, you ought not pay attention to things which are here today and vanish tomorrow, nor to turn your

soul away from those immutable goods which never fail, in which there are peace and freedom from care and everlasting joy." After these words she turned to prayer and asked earnestly that her soul be taken up by the hands of the Lord.

32

And so, on the first day of November she began to be severely weakened by the dissolution of her body. But even then amidst her pains she did not rest from salutary preaching, for she instructed all who came to her by advising them to watch carefully the end of her life, showing how much happiness they would have who left this life with souls cleansed and purified of the world's filth. When her body was made feeble by the exceeding gravity of her illness, and she perceived that her death was now near at hand, she asked Blessed Elerius, who had been called to her, that her body be given up for burial next to the body of his mother, Blessed Theonia. When the holy man most kindly granted this, turning again to prayer, on that same day, that is November 2, she commended her spirit into the hands of the Creator to be joined to the heavenly choir. Seeing this, those who were there gave way to most vehement lamentations on account of her departure. What groaning, what outpouring of tears was there then? No one was free from wailing; each sex and age turned itself to profuse lamentation, and the more each one believed that she counseled and aided him, so much the greater sorrow did he feel on account of her absence. Although the mourning was unbearable for all, an enormous grief affected especially the virgins who had lived with her; indeed, they were lamenting aloud that they had lost their mistress and their teacher of salvation.

33

And so, with all lamenting her departure in a different way, Blessed Elerius, hastening to them with words of consolation, imposed silence on them. Then, commending her soul to God, he began with care to attend to everything that seemed to pertain to the blessed maiden's final rites. Thereafter, he ordered the body, prepared in the manner of those to be buried, to be carried into the church. When everything that pertained to the funeral or burial had been completed, the body was consigned to the earth, accompanied by the very great lamentation of all, in that place which she had requested. Indeed, many men of great merit also rest in the same cemetery; even the famous and most holy confessors, Chebius and Senanus, are reported to be there. The first of these is buried at her head; indeed, the other rests in the same row in which she lies. Certainly they are remembered among the native people there to have been men of great virtues, and to have come to the same place on account of the multitude of saints whom they heard had gathered there to complete the struggle of the present life. In the same district there still exist some churches in their memory, in which their great merit before God is shown clearly to men through numerous miracles. Buried to the left of Winefride rests Blessed Theonia, about whom we reported above; God alone knows the names and number of the other saints who repose there. Indeed, that place is held to be venerable due to so great a gathering of saints that no mortal at all could know their names or even comprehend the number of those gathered. With all of these the blessed maiden, Winefride, famous for virtues and illustrious for her countless miracles, adorns the same place. Truly, after her death, many who came there and sought from God a cure for their infirmities through her aid obtained the desired remedies. Moreover, that place was held in great renown and was sought out with great reverence and veneration by many for the sake of prayer. In fact, after a period

of some years, Blessed Elerius, a man of highest sanctity and exceeding perfection, departed to the Lord, leaving this life filled with every holiness and piety. Buried in the church of his own name, he has not ceased to be illustrious for his many miracles even to this day; bringing much respect and dignity to this place, he is renowned for his very many miracles.

34

Truly, the place in which the first signs of the blessed maiden's way of life were evident is considered venerable, with much visitation of the faithful. For often very clear miracles happen there under the gaze of the blessed maiden, through which those coming know that Blessed Winefride can succour their injuries, and because of that a throng of faithful people devoutly rush there in troops from all sides, hoping that they will obtain cures for their bodies and souls through her prayers. Moreover, the devotion of those coming there is increased daily, of those seeing the very swift spring which burst from the place where the virgin's head first fell to the earth, and of those looking at the stones which lie in the bottom of the stream; with her blood still preserved on these, it is evident that they grew red through the martyrdom of the maiden. When many flock around with minds disposed to see this, observing that the blood adhering to the stones cannot be washed away by the constant flowing of water running over them, they marvel at the strangeness of the thing, and they return to their own places glorifying the special privilege of the maiden. Many infirm persons also come there and, made well, return to their own homes.

35

A certain workman living in that country had a daughter blind from birth. Hearing that many people had been granted their health through the merits of Blessed Winefride, with very great devotion he took his daughter (who was asking every day to be taken) to the spring of the holy maiden. Brought there at a late hour, she first bathed her head in the spring, and then she was taken to the church to pray there without sleeping for the whole night. While this was happening, at dawn she asked that she be permitted to sleep a little. When this had been granted to her and a place prepared for her to rest, she slept for a long time; then awaking, she declared that she saw well. Moreover, observing her and learning that it was just as she was asserting, her father made known what God had effected with respect to his daughter on account of the merits of Saint Winefride, and with his words stirring all who were present to proclaim the praises of the maiden, he returned with his daughter to his own home. Because of this miracle many people, inflamed in their devotion to the blessed maiden, were proclaiming here and there to all listening the mighty works of her miraculous powers. In truth, through wondrous works of this kind which happened on account of her, certain ones, clinging to her with ardent love, went to her as if to a singular refuge, and after a little while, having obtained their wishes, they returned to their homes. This will be shown clearly from the example below.

36

By chance a considerable disturbance occurred at a certain time in those parts. When the more noble and powerful men of that province had sent a messenger to their friends in the vicinity so that they might set a careful watch on their property and be very cautiously on guard for themselves, their courier, surrounded by robbers, swiftly took flight to the church of the blessed maiden, Winefride. Moreover, with

his enemies ever-following him by his tracks, he entered the churchyard on the horse he was riding, leapt down from the horse at the door of the church, and secured the bridle by tying it to the bar of the door. Then, also wanting to avoid the enemies who were drawing very near to him, he ran swiftly to the altar. However, one of the robbers, bolder than the others, a man who did not respect God nor His saints, entering the enclosure with bold presumption, came on the run to the horse; seizing the bridle with outstretched hand and loosing it from the bar of the gate, he led the horse away without any fear at all of the maiden's punishment. Indeed, the man to whom the horse belonged came out of the church and did not find the horse where he had left it. Moreover, knowing that his horse had been taken by those who had followed him as he fled, he again entered the church; there putting his complaint before God and the blessed maiden, he lamented bitterly the violence brought against him and that he could not find peace within the enclosure of the church. Earnestly asking the maiden, Saint Winefride, with great supplication that she be mindful of that presumptuous and overly-bold arrogance, and that she bring swift vengeance for the crime committed, while going out of the church he was compelled to follow on foot the way upon which the rider had started. After a short time, truly, the blessed maiden showed that the violation of her churchyard and her church was a concern to her, and she made clear that she does not ever heedlessly neglect a complaint brought to her with lamentation. Indeed, the man who had loosed the horse tied to the church door and led him away began to grow weak due to a very serious sickness. Also, after a little while that weakness was drawn from the whole body and conveyed itself entirely to his right arm; it took hold upon the wretched man, bringing him such great misery and affliction that he preferred to die rather than to be afflicted by such great distress. The torment even grew by daily increases, and it could not be relieved by any physician's cure. It did not cease until that entire

arm with its hand, putrefied from the noxious fluid that had gathered there, fell from the rest of the body after excessive, unbearable sufferings. But not even then could that most wretched man rest or entirely escape his former troubles until, coming to the aforementioned church of the blessed maiden, he humbly acknowledged her merits and begged forgiveness for the crime he had committed. Then, indeed, relieved somewhat from his violent pain through the mercy of the holy maiden, he was kept there as a warning to others. Fortunately, at the sight of him all who lay in ambush for the property of others were terrified, and they were warned in a dreadful way that none should intrude beyond the churchyard. In addition, all who saw that that man had been punished for such boldness and wretched audacity by so lamentable a recompense marveled at the maiden's merits and became more devout in her service. In fact, the one who had lost his arm, while making satisfaction to the blessed maiden by public penance because he had burst into the enclosure of her church with rash boldness and had raised his hand against her, restrained many from presumption of this kind. People rushed in throngs from all quarters wishing to see that unusual miracle, and when it had been seen, they returned full of wonder, grandly proclaiming the maiden's praises.

37

Also, another no less wondrous miracle was brought to pass through Blessed Winefride. In a certain district of the aforementioned church, thieves who showed no respect for the blessed maiden led away with them by stealth a cow which they found. However, fearing that the people who lived nearby might follow them and be guided to them directly by the tracks of the cow they were leading away, they turned to a hard, stony path on which they thought that neither their tracks nor the animal's tracks could be seen. In truth, there is no counsel;

there is no wisdom nor strength against the Lord! Indeed, as they proceeded on the rocky way on which they thought to hide themselves more completely, their wickedness first began to be detected there. For immediately the cow drove its hooves into the ground as far as the knees, and the animal's tracks were clearly evident on the stones just as on the hard, dry path. The more they thought they were proceeding secretly, the more there was recognition of their flight, with God manifesting the merits of the maiden through their steps. In fact, the farther they proceeded, the safer they believed it would be for them, and the more securely they trusted that they would keep what they had taken. But it turned out to the contrary for them. For when those from whom the cow had been stolen learned that their animal had been taken from them by stealth, they began immediately to pursue the thieves with a very great troop of men. Observing the animal's tracks impressed on the stones and the dry earth, they were made more certain and carefully followed the impression of the hooves. Invoking the aid of the blessed maiden through whose merits they saw so evident a miracle in the rocks and in the hard ground, they rushed along the way indicated to them by the cow's tracks. In fact, hearing the shouts of those pursuing them and fearing that they would be caught by them with the animal which they were leading, the robbers departed from the path. But they could not be concealed in this way, for those following wherever they went always found the impressions of the animal's hooves clearly in the rocks and in the dry soil; strengthened in spirit and comforted by the miracle shown to them, they pursued with confidence. And the thieves, recognising that the farther they proceeded, so ever-clearer were the animal's tracks, and that they could by no means escape unless they sought flight in different directions after the cow was released, they left it in a grove and, fleeing very swiftly, they hid themselves. In fact, those who were pursuing them, finding the cow alone after those who were

leading it away had fled, took what was theirs and began to go back. Moreover, examining carefully whether their animal made tracks of this kind in the stones and the earth while going back, as it had made when it was led away, they found none at all. Then indeed they knew that the blessed maiden had worked that miracle for their sakes, namely, so that through the animal's tracks they might recognise where they ought to proceed, and they might pursue more rapidly what had been taken from them by unjust pillage. In fact, upon returning they restored the cow to its own master and publicly proclaimed the miracle that had been performed. Also, many people went out to see what was said about the tracks, and finding what was proclaimed to be true, they themselves did not cease to proclaim the same things as well. On account of this all who gaped with longing at the possessions of others and plotted deception in their heart were exceedingly terrified, and they were especially warned in an amazing way that they should not snatch away anything or in any way commit robbery within the district that extended to the church of the blessed maiden. Moreover, fearing the maiden's anger and fearing that God, grievously displeased because of the contempt for her, might avenge their presumptuous boldness, and that they would thus suffer punishment, the robbers came to the church of the holy maiden begging forgiveness with humble hearts. Confessing there in a public oath that they had done wrong, they proclaimed grandly the merits of the maiden, and dissuading all who heard them from lawless presumption of this kind, they returned to their own homes.

Likewise, in declarations of those who speak the truth, wonders are related concerning the spring which (we mentioned before) burst forth where the severed head of the maiden fell to earth. When delicate little children are ill, afflicted with some disease of the body,

their cheerful mothers receive them restored suddenly to good health after they have been thrust into the gushing water of this spring and submerged in the swiftness of the stream. It is also commonly known among almost all the inhabitants of Wales that if someone with a fever or one suffering in any limb sprinkles himself with that water or applies the stones bathed by her blood (which we have taught before are found in the brook) to the suffering limb, after the water from the washing of the stones has first been drunk, he will be restored to health immediately. Some people are even urged by divine providence to go there for bathing. Moreover, many come there, very often with the maiden herself urging them through a vision at night, and while returning from there they obtain their wishes.

39

Along the descent of that brook is an excellent mill belonging to the property of the blessed maiden, Winefride, which never ceases to grind on account of any great quantity of rain or snow overflowing it, or any ice, or the troublesomeness of a burning summer drought restricting it. Robbers once went to it and carried off with them the iron implements or instruments by which that kind is used, transferring them to another mill. Truly, while these parts were there, the wheel could not go around nor could any profit come to those officials of the mill. Moreover, the overseers of that function, seeing their trade diminish each day on account of these parts which had been stolen, and no longer enduring their diminution, threw out those parts which they had received from the thieves: immediately, the wheel acquired its freedom to turn the mill, and the other functional instruments followed their old way. The robbers again transferred those castaway parts to other places, where the same things happened in every respect. Finally, understanding that those things were done by divine ordinance, namely that they could not serve to the advan-

tage or gain of any place, they took them back to their proper place, led by repentance and begging forgiveness through the aid of the blessed maiden. In this deed the merits of Saint Winefride and her praises among all the inhabitants of that country were exalted in the highest, and they restrained the bestial madness of the wicked, when all understood that it would go badly for them if ever, enticed by deadly greed, they proceeded against the possessions of the saints.

40

For reasons of this kind, that place in which the blessed maiden, Winefride, had first dwelt has gained the greatest renown. In addition, the prophecy of Blessed Beuno in that place was so powerful that through the blessed maiden, whose first monastic profession was there, the mighty works of God were publicly proclaimed, and many people there found the remedies they wanted for their infirmities. And just as she asked that the place be blessed by God and hallowed by heavenly visitation, so was it afterward shown by clear signs that she had been heard by God on these matters. Indeed, in the display of miracles and in the approbation of wondrous works which happened there it is plainly evident that the aforementioned saint had heralded the truth: it was his prediction that the place would be hallowed by the grace of Heaven, and that God would effect the salvation of many there through the merits of this same maiden. Even today, crowds of faithful people flocking there in troops and returning with joy to their own homes, having obtained what they came for, bear witness to this. And much more copiously do divine mercies occur there for the infirm than in the place where the clay of her most holy body was entombed. I think this has happened for this reason, that she always held that place as her own special one in which the beginnings of her monastic life first shone forth and she was initiated into the divine mysteries, and in which the signs of her martyrdom remain fresh for

∞ THE LIFE & TRANSLATION OF ST. WINEFRIDE ∞

all time. Nevertheless, divine power works wondrously in both places, and through her aid countless mighty works occur, and desired remedies are granted to the sick. Indeed, sight is restored to the blind through her, and hearing is given to the deaf, and almost all who come there boast that they have obtained their wishes through her, to the praise of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, who with the Father and Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

