

# ST. LAURENCE O'TOOLE

St Laurence O'Toole (Lorcán Ó Tuathail) was born in Castledermot, Co. Kildare in 1128. He became Abbot of Glendalough in 1153 and Archbishop of Dublin in 1162. He died in Eu in Normandy on the 14th of November 1180 and was canonised in 1225.



His eventful life can be summarised under eight headings.

## 1. HOSTAGE.

Laurence's father was Maurice O'Toole, King of Hy Murray. When Laurence was 10 he was given as a hostage to Dermot McMurrugh, King of Leinster, who treated him with great harshness. The boy was sent in chains to a remote area where he was ill-housed, ill-clothed and ill-fed. For two years, the king's son learned what it was to experience real poverty and oppression.

## 2. MONK.

After two years, Dermot was forced to release Laurence and send him to [Glendalough monastery](#), where his father could reclaim him. When Maurice arrived, he found his son had fallen in love with the life of the monks and he gave him permission to join the community. Laurence was only 25 when he was elected Abbot, and he proved to be the greatest Abbot of Glendalough since St Kevin its founder. He encouraged learning, built new churches and renewed -monastic life by bringing in monks from the continent. He was unfailing in his care for the poor and sold the monastery treasures to feed famine victims.

## 3. ARCHBISHOP.

In 1162 Laurence became the first Irish Archbishop of the Danish city of Dublin. Many of the citizens were no more than nominal Christians and he made it his duty to deepen their faith and reform their lives. He introduced Augustinian monks from France to Christ Church Cathedral to reform the liturgy and he became a member of their community. He continued his works of charity, especially towards homeless children, whom he led and housed in his own residence.

## 4. CONTEMPLATIVE.

Laurence was a man of prayer. He rose in the early hours to sing the office with the other monks in the cathedral and often stayed on afterwards, deep in prayer. Then he would walk for a time in the graveyard, watching and praying over the city as it woke to another day. When his duties allowed him, he liked nothing better than to escape to Glendalough and spend a few days in solitude in a lakeside hermitage which could be reached only by boat.

## 5. MEDIATOR.

The Normans landed in Ireland in 1190. The following year they besieged Dublin under their leader, Strongbow. Laurence met Strongbow to arrange a peace but the Normans attacked while the talks were going on. They seized the city, and began killing the citizens and looting their houses. Laurence saved the lives of many by the sheer force of his presence and he carried the bodies of others in his own arms to be buried. In spite of many setbacks, he was to continue his efforts as peace-maker to the end of his life.

## 6. TRAVELLER

For the last ten years of his life, Laurence was a constant traveller. He often visited England in his efforts to bring about peace between the two countries. Sea travel was hazardous and shipwrecks were common. More than once, his ship was caught in a violent storm and its safe arrival was attributed to the power of his prayer. Travellers believed that when he was on board, they had nothing to fear. His efforts were not entirely in vain. In 1175 he was one of the signers of the Treaty of Windsor between England's King Henry II and Ireland's High King, Roderick O'Connor.

## 7. LEGATE.

Laurence led the six Irish bishops who attended the Third Lateran Council in Rome in 1179. Pope Alexander III was so impressed that he appointed him Papal Legate to Ireland with the responsibility of reforming the Church in Ireland and defending it against attack. On his return, Laurence summoned a council of the Irish Church at Clonfert which took firm action against the abuses of the time. It was only his death that prevented him from completing his work of reformation.

## 8. SAINT

Laurence left Dublin for the last time in the spring of 1180. His mission was to settle a dispute that had arisen between the English and Irish Kings. Henry II, the man responsible for the murder of St Thomas a Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, received him badly, abused him roundly and forbade him to return to Ireland. Then he went to visit his dominions in Normandy. Laurence followed him, sick and exhausted though he was. He died in the monastery at Eu, without having met the King. His tomb in Eu rapidly became a place of pilgrimage and many miracles were attributed to his intercession. He was canonised in 1225.

The above summary of the life of St Laurence O'Toole is based on [THE MAN IN THE MIDDLE](#) by Desmond Forristal, published by Veritas, which is recommended for further reading.

# St. Laurence O'Toole Colouring Worksheet



This is Laurence O'Toole aged 10 with his parents. Colour the picture. Write their names above their heads. Cut them out and paste them into your R.E. copy/scrapbook. How do you think Laurence felt when his father gave him as a peace hostage to Dermot Mac Murrough? What happened to Laurence after this? Write the answers in your copy.

# St. Laurence O'Toole Peacemaker Worksheet



Christian Name ..... Family Name.....

Year of Birth.....

Father's Name ..... Mother's Name .....

Born in Castledermot, Co. .... . At a young age fostered to Donagh

O'Connor, King of ..... . Laurence's father was the local ..... . At

..... years of age Maurice gave his son Laurence as a ..... hostage to

Dermot Mac Murrough ..... of Leinster. In 1140 after two years in captivity

Laurence went to school in ..... Abbey where he later became a monk. In

1153 he was elected ..... which means he was in charge of the monastery. As

Abbot Laurence fed the hungry who were starving because of ..... . He became

..... of Dublin in ..... and died at ..... in Normandy in 1180. He was

..... by the Pope in 1225. His Feast day is November .....

# Who was St. Laurence O'Toole?

## Narration

### **Narrator:**

Laurence was born in 1128 in Castledermot, Co. Kildare. His father and mother followed the Irish custom of having, Laurence fostered at a young age to Donagh O'Connor, King of Offaly. Laurence's father, Maurice O'Toole, as local Chieftain, owed obedience to Dermot Mac Murrough, King of Leinster. In 1138 Dermot Mac Murrough demanded a hostage from the family of Maurice O'Toole to be assured of the loyalty of the O'Toole family in his struggle to become high King of Ireland. If the O'Toole family broke the agreement, the hostage would either have been killed or maimed. Maurice gave his son, Laurence, as a peace hostage.

In 1140 Dermot MacMurrough agreed to exchange Laurence for Twelve of his own soldiers which had been captured by the O' Toole clan.

As neither family trusted each other they asked the Bishop of Glendalough to be the mediator and Glendalough Abbey was chosen as the place where the exchange took place. Maurice O'Toole was so grateful to have his son back after two years of captivity that he agreed to send one of his sons to Glendalough Abbey to be educated. Laurence was educated in Glendalough and became a member of the community. In 1153 Laurence was elected Abbot of Glendalough.

## Laurence's Concern for the Poor

**Narrator:** As Abbot in Glendalough Laurence was concerned about the needs of the people in the Wicklow area who faced a severe famine. The story is told that the day after he was made Abbot Laurence went out into the misty morning, he saw a crowd of people sitting and lying on the ground outside the gate. He looked at them through the bars. They were thin and wretched. All gazed at him appealingly, but not one spoke.

**Reader 1:** (Laurence): What ails you, my children?

**Narrator:** An old man tottered to the gate.

**Reader 2:** We are starving! Our crops have failed, our beasts have perished. We haven't a crust of bread or a drop of milk for the children. Have pity on us!

**Narrator:** Lawrence unbarred the gate and flung both sides wide open.

**Reader 1:** (Laurence): Come in! The guest hall is prepared. You shall not be kept waiting.

**Narrator:** They swarmed about the young Abbot as he led the way into the big hall. The monks came running and, before the wind had blown away the mist, great bowls of hot porridge were placed down the centre of the tables. All the benches in the monastery were brought down for the people. But there were so many that most of them had to sit on the floor. As the bowls were emptied Laurence saw more people crowding up the path to the gate. These came from the far side the mountains, yet they told the same story-the crops had failed, their cattle had perished.

**Reader 3:** 'Twas the late frosts!

**Reader 4:** Not at all! 'Twas the twenty-one days' drought!

**Narrator:** The Abbot heard how the seed shrivelled in the ground, the grass was brown and the earth like hot powder.

**Reader (a Monk):** It's a famine. There hasn't been one like it for years! How shall we feed them all? What shall we do when all our provisions are gone?

**Reader 1 (Laurence):** When the time comes we shall learn!

**Narrator:** Whole villages came trooping into the courtyard until it was like an encampment. Outside, on every level patch of ground, some family sat down, and there they all waited for the young Abbot to feed them. When the last bit of food in the monastery was eaten. Lawrence said to the monk who had charge of the stores:

**Reader 1(Laurence):** Take what money we have and buy food. The people must be fed!

**Narrator:** When all the money in the monastery was spent, Laurence exchanged manuscripts and anything of value he could find for more food. He sent to his family for help, and to everyone he knew. Cartloads of food came trundling over the causeway and, by the time of the next harvest, the young Abbot could boast that he had not refused food to person who had asked for it. The Abbey in Glendalough became a centre of relief for famine victims. As well as a school, Laurence established a hospital and an orphanage for the care of the famine victims.

# ST. LAURENCE O'TOOLE - WORD SEARCH

- 1 Laurence was born in this Co.Kildare town.
- 2 The surname of the person who took Laurence hostage.
- 3 Laurence was fostered at a young age to the King of this county.
- 4 Laurence was returned to his family in exchange for twelve of these.
- 5 The Abbey where Laurence received his education
- 6 The name of the religious order which Laurence Joined.
- 7 Laurence was appointed to this position in Dublin in 1162
- 8 The original name of the cathedral which is now called Christ Church.
- 9 Another name for the descendants of the Norsemen who lived in Dublin with the native Irish.
- 10 The name of the English King before whom the King of Leinster took the oath of allegiance.
- 11 This Treaty ended a period of tension between the Kings of England and Connacht.
- 12 The name of the town where Laurence died.
- 13 Laurence was given this title for two places in Europe.

O V J V M X Z N G X Y J J U E  
A R C H B I S H O P O R K H G  
C S B H Y P W Y N V M K A T G  
G T F O B I A S N A I M O L N  
M R I Y N F S O C T Z M E A F  
X Q J D H Q R M N Q R N I O E  
D V S T T T U K S E D N H N U  
J O G Q A R H R D A I E Y Y B  
R K P P R R E E L T S K R L O  
B T N O V I L O S Q N H N A E  
L A U J D T U U Y Q A R E F S  
J G V L S G G R Y F M B H F Y  
H M O A H U J N R V R U I O F  
U S C E A R D U K I O L T Y B  
N J R H O L Y T R I N I T Y P

# St. Laurence O'Toole Poem

He was a hostage to Dermot Mac Murrrough,  
Mac Murrrough na gall.  
A brave, fearless boy he was taken  
Out from his father's hall

Into the tyrant's keeping  
The little hostage went.  
So early he knew sorrow  
And all that sorrow meant.

Rescued from Mac Murrrough  
To Glendalough he came.  
And, as the years passed slowly  
All Ireland learned his name.

Now a great man in Dublin,  
Archbishop Laurence saw  
The people he loved turned outcast  
with neither land nor law.

King Rory in his castle,  
The nobles in their forts  
had little care for Ireland,  
Nor honour in their thoughts.

But Laurence rode throughout the land-  
"Unite! Unite!" he cried.  
"For Church and Country arm and fight!"  
He would not be denied.

A hostage in his boyhood:  
A patriot to the end:  
A saint who struggled all his days  
His country to defend.

(from *Knights of God* by Patrick Lynch)



## **Answers to Word Search**

- 1. Castledermot**
- 2. MacMurrough**
- 3. Offaly**
- 4. Soldiers**
- 5. Glendalough**
- 6. Augustinian**
- 7. Archbishop**
- 8. Holy Trinity**
- 9. Normans**
- 10. Henry**
- 11. Windsor**
- 12. Eu**
- 13. Patron.**