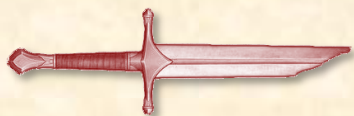


THE SELF-SACRIFICE OF ST MAGNUS



It was in Birsay too that, after initial reluctance, Bishop William of Orkney declared Magnus a saint, and it was from here that his bones were later carried to the church in Kirkwall – along the path the St Magnus Way is seeking to reconstruct. Thanks to the kindness of the local minister and his associates, it will be possible to pray Psalms in the church at Birsay and listen to a reading from one of the Sagas. **So, this alternative second stage of our pilgrimage focusses on the growing awareness of the power flowing from Magnus' self-sacrifice.**

On Sunday afternoon, in the great **Cathedral of St Magnus, Kirkwall**, our pilgrimage reaches its climax. This astonishing building was raised in honour of the saint by his nephew, Earl Rognvald.



It is the jewel of the city of Kirkwall, the pride of Orkney, and, through many vicissitudes, still a place of living prayer. We are grateful to Orkney Islands Council and to the authorities of the Church of Scotland for the chance to celebrate the Eucharist, the sacramental re-enactment of the sacrifice of Christ, in this hallowed place. It was in a pillar here that, in 1919, a casket containing what are generally thought to be the bones of St Magnus himself, was discovered. The bones are still there. Here, we will sense the power of faith and love to transform humanity and to change culture for the better. The Gospel reading will speak of the seed that falls into the

ST MAGNUS THE PEACE-MAKER



ground, dies and brings forth much fruit. Here, remembering Magnus the Peace-maker, we can only ask ourselves how the Beatitudes of Christ can create new culture in our own life and in our world. **So, this final phase of our pilgrimage encourages us to make our own lives a life-giving offering akin to that of Magnus, a true disciple of Christ.**

Of course, a pilgrimage has many other aspects. It will be a time to discover Orkney, to be together with our fellow-pilgrims, to meet the bishops of Scotland and those from further afield, including London, Denmark and Orkney. There will surely be informal opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation and moments of spontaneous prayer. There will be sea-voyages and the challenges of the weather. Above all, I hope, it will be a chance to discover once again the beauty of holiness, the presence of God among us.

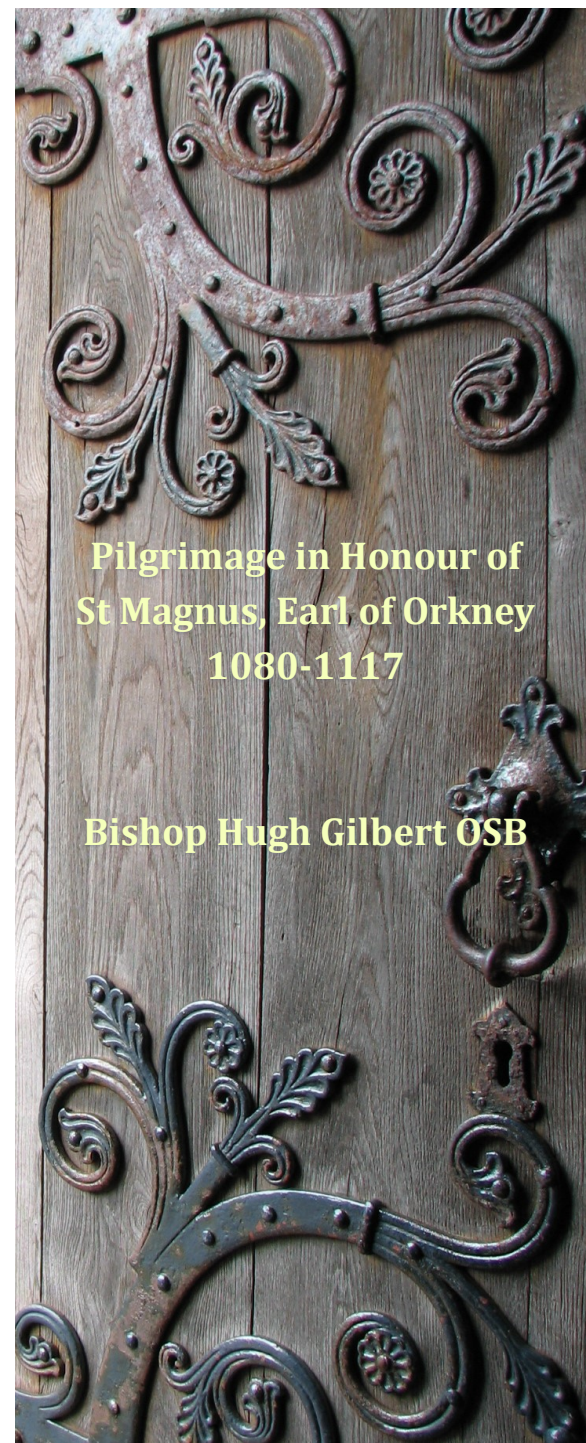
+ Hugh Gilbert OSB
Bishop of Aberdeen



*RC Diocese of Aberdeen Charitable Trust.
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**Pilgrimage in Honour of
St Magnus, Earl of Orkney
1080-1117**

Bishop Hugh Gilbert OSB



THE PERSON AND INFLUENCE OF ST MAGNUS

Dear Pilgrim,

We are here to commemorate the 900th anniversary of the martyrdom of St Magnus. We are here on pilgrimage.

This pilgrimage has a shape and unity. I would like to sketch it here.

It begins on Friday evening in the **St Magnus Centre** beside Kirkwall's Cathedral with a presentation of the person and influence of Magnus himself. Different aspects will be covered: his life and death, his recognition as a saint and the celebration of his sanctity in the architecture of the Cathedral, in liturgical music and, very close to our own times in the work of George Mackay Brown and the composer Peter Maxwell Davies. There will also be input on the recent development of the St Magnus Way, an initiative that fits so well with this anniversary year. St Magnus Erlendsson, St Magnus the Martyr, born in 1080 and a martyr for peace in 1117, is a living presence in these islands. **The first stage of our pilgrimage will help us grasp the person, the story and the stature of St Magnus.**



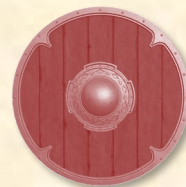
The second 'station' of our pilgrimage takes place on Saturday, with two celebrations. (Time and geography mean each of us has to choose one or the other). The first possibility is to go, by

THE MARTYRDOM OF ST MAGNUS

boat, to the island of **Egilsay**. It was here, during Easter week of 1117, that St Magnus was martyred. Orkney, then part of the kingdom of Norway, had at that time an ill-advised system of government: the joint rule of two earls. When friendship and cooperation prevailed, all was well, but strife was only too likely. From around 1105, Magnus was one of the earls of Orkney, his



cousin Hakon the other. Their earlier good relations, however, were undermined by their followers, and the spirit of envy gripped Hakon. A futile civil war ensued. The wise urged reconciliation, and a peace negotiation was arranged for the island of Egilsay in Easter week 1117. Each earl was to come with only two boatloads of followers. Hakon, however, came with eight, and Magnus realised all too clearly what lay ahead. 'Let it turn out as God wills,' he



said. He spent the night in prayer and attended Mass. He made three offers of peace, each involving his own removal from the political scene and the end of joint rule. But more drastic

ST MAGNUS DECLARED A SAINT

counsel prevailed. 'We had better kill him', said Hakon. 'I don't want an early death; I much prefer ruling over people and places.' Magnus met his fate with prayer, cheerfulness and dignity. A reluctant cook, Lifolf, had to be drafted in to deliver the fatal axe blow. Magnus forgave his enemies, offered his life as a sacrifice, and the last word on his lips was 'mercy'. The spot where he was killed was said to have changed afterwards from boulder and moss to a green field. Later, the church of St Magnus was built on the island, and it is in the ruins of that church that, weather permitting, Mass will be celebrated. **This second stage of our pilgrimage focusses on the martyrdom of St Magnus** – a moment of so many meanings for us and our world.



Saints have an afterlife also. The alternative pilgrimage on Saturday has **Birsay** as its goal. The plan is to walk from where his body was brought to the mainland from Egilsay to the church in Birsay. It was in the church there, thanks to the efforts of his mother Thora, that St Magnus' remains were interred. It was there that rumours of miracles through his intercession first surfaced. As an early Latin poem put it: 'The urn [i.e. Magnus' body] is broken, but the fragrance steals To the sick and suffering, whom its perfume heals.'