

Saint Thorfinn



***Saint Thorfinn of Hamar***

**Feast Day: January 8**



**Patronage:**  
**advocate for separation of Church and state;**  
**religious freedom**

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## St. Thorfinn of Hamar

(Born at Trondheim in Norway in the thirteenth century and was believed to be a Cistercian monk before becoming the Bishop of Hamar. He died on January 8, 1285)

\*Fame. Many people want it, but few attain it. At least few attain the sort of fame that turns their name into a household word around the country - let alone the world.

Instead, most people have to be content with being known by their family and friends or perhaps getting their photo in the newspaper or on local TV.

Everyone craving fame and for those content with living in relative anonymity, has an unofficial patron saint: St. Thorfinn, who also ranks as one of the few Norwegian saints (King St. Olaf II is the patron saint of Norway).

How Thorfinn came to be a saint makes an interesting story.

Thorfinn had gone to Rome on a pilgrimage. He felt sick when he returned to the Cistercian abbey in Ter Doest, in the Flanders region of Belgium, where he was a monk.

So he wrote his will, leaving his few possessions to his mother, brothers and sisters, and monasteries, churches and charities in Norway. He died, was buried in the abbey church and no one thought any more about him.

One day, 50 years later, as the abbey was doing some building work, Thorfinn's tomb was opened. To the amazement of the crew, his remains had a strong and pleasing smell.

"Who was this guy?" the abbot wondered. So he started asking the monks if anyone remembered him. "Sure," said Fr. Walter de Muda, an aged monk, "I remember him. He was a bishop from Norway who joined us. He was a gentle, good, strong man. In fact, I wrote a poem about him after he died and hung it over his tomb."

The abbot ordered them to look for the poem and sure enough, there it was and the parchment Walter had written it on looked as good as it did 50 years earlier.

All of this was seen as a sign from God that Thorfinn was a saintly man who should be remembered. So Fr. Walter was told to write down his recollections.

What is known about St. Thorfinn is that he was from Trondheim, Norway. He was a priest, possibly on the staff of the cathedral of Nidaros. It is thought that he witnessed the signing of the Agreement of Tönsberg in 1277 between King Magnus VI and the Archbishop of Nidaros confirming the rights of the clergy, including their ability to choose bishops.

A few years later, King Eric abolished the treaty. That led to a fierce church-state battle resulting in the banning of the archbishop and his two chief supporters, Bp. Andrew of Oslo and the by then Bp. Thorfinn of Hamar.

In response, Bp. Thorfinn fled to the abbey in Ter Doest, which had contacts with the Norwegian church. He suffered several hardships, including a shipwreck, en route. And that was how he became a monk and later a saint.

\*(Excerpted from:: [www.the.compassnews.org](http://www.the.compassnews.org))