

Saint Anselm
(Bishop and Doctor)

21 April



About Saint Anselm (1033 - 1109)

Saint Anselm was born in Aosta, in northern Italy, which at that time was part of the Kingdom of Burgundy. Today, Aosta is part of Piedmont in the Italian Alps. He became a monk of Bec in Normandy, where he taught theology and devoted himself to the spiritual life. He served first as prior and then as abbot of Bec.

Lanfranc, Anselm's master, was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury and when he died in 1089 King William II of England seized the lands and finances of the Archdiocese of Canterbury and left the office of the Archbishop empty. (At this time, bishops were appointed by kings.)

In 1093, public pressure forced William to appoint Anselm as Archbishop of Canterbury. Anselm did not have an easy time in this role, as he had many bitter disputes with the kings of England over the independence of the Church which resulted in him twice being exiled. His disputes arose from his program of Gregorian reform which included doing away with lay investiture which was the power of a secular authority to appoint bishops.

He died at Canterbury on 21 April 1109. He is remembered for his theological learning and writings, and for organising and reforming church life in England.

Anselm is a Doctor of the Church and is called the Father of Scholasticism for his works on theology.

What can we learn from Saint Anselm's life?

Like Pope Saint Martin I, whose feast we celebrated last week, Anselm, who lived about 400 years after him, faced the same problem of the relationship between Church and State. The Church of England has continued the practice of the sovereign appointing bishops.

Whilst Saint Martin had to deal with theological issues with secular powers, Saint Anselm had to deal with power and financial matters. Absolute power corrupts absolutely and King William II was a perfect example of that problem. Anselm did not let that get to him. He persevered in preaching the Gospel and doing the Lord's work, even though he was exiled twice.

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In the hardships we encounter, let us pray for the strength to persevere in them and pray that God will bless those people who cause us problems. We must live out our faith joyfully and prayerfully no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.

In the Gospel Reading for today's liturgy Jesus tells his disciples:

'Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall: it was founded on rock.'

Yes, indeed, Saint Anselm's life was founded on Christ – solid as a rock. He did not waver from it. Storms came Saint Anselm's way, but he was fixed on Christ and his teaching. We must be the same.

The Collect

O God, who led the Bishop Saint Anselm to seek out and teach the depths of your wisdom, grant, we pray, that our faith in you may so aid our understanding, that what we believe by your command may give delight to our hearts. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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Gospel Reading

Matthew 7:21-29

Jesus said to his disciples:

'It is not those who say to me,

"Lord, Lord," who will enter the kingdom of heaven,

but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven.

When the day comes many will say to me,

"Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name,

cast out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?"

Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from me, you evil men!

'Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them

will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock.

Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew

and hurled themselves against that house,

and it did not fall: it was founded on rock.

But everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them

will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand.

Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell;

and what a fall it had!

Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say,

and his teaching made a deep impression on the people

because he taught them with authority, and not like their own scribes.

Antiphon

Behold a faithful and prudent steward

to give them their allowance of food at the proper time, alleluia.

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A Hymn for Memorial of Saint Anselm

Saint Anselm, Bishop and Doctor,
who followed Christ until the end:
preaching His Gospel through the land,
each day on Him you did depend.

Christ was your foundation most sure,
like a house that was built on rock:
pow'r and money you did spurn
in serving the sheep of your flock.

Serving both the King and the Church,
when conflicts rose you saw the need
to reconcile different views,
opposing acts of selfish greed.

O Christ, help us rely on you,
be guided by Your Holy Word,
like Saint Anselm, a servant be,
our deeds and words with you accord.

Text: Chris deSilva and Alessio Loiacono
Tune: LM, O Waly Waly

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