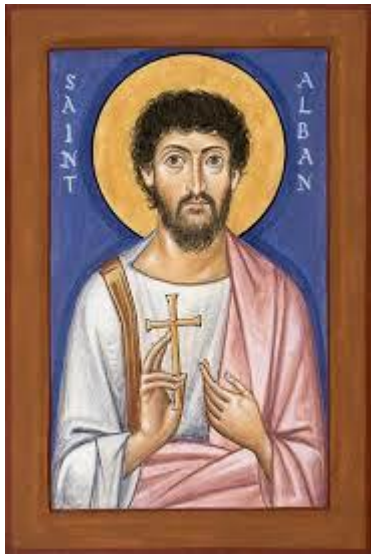


Reflections for FB, 22-27 June

22. Monday. St Alban



Throughout the year the church remembers special people who have been part of her life since the time of Christ. Some are well known to us like the twelve apostles and others have been great teachers or missionaries. Others have been more local and less well known. This weeks' reflections will be on people who the church remembers this week. We start today with Alban, remembered specially in this part of the world because of his local connection, and because our Cathedral and Diocese are named after him.

We actually know very little about his life apart from the one great act that ended in him losing his life for his new found faith in Jesus and his refusal to give up that new faith in the face of death. So new to the faith, but he counted it more than his life.

The story is simple that at a time of persecution in Britain, Alban a Roman, sheltered a priest and was converted by him. When Alban was captured in place of the priest he refused to renounce his new found faith in Jesus and was put to death. One the many hundreds who counted Christ as more important than anything else in the first few hundred years if the existence of the church. It has been said the church was founded with the blood of the martyrs.

We live in much more secure times with a freedom to have and practice our faith and worship than he did. Of course his story still resonates today because we know that in other parts of the world people may still suffer persecution and threats of death for having a conviction about Jesus that leads them to follow him and do things in His name that others oppose.

But for us in more free and secure places, it asks questions of us. Is my faith in Jesus as important as Alban found his? Ready to suffer at the hands of others if necessary because He is all-in-all and so Ultimate for all I hold dear?

23. St Etheldreda, Abbess of Ely



A church in nearby Hatfield gives this saint a local connection too.

Etheldreda is also known as Aethelthryth or Audrey, and was an East Anglian Saxon Princess (636-679 AD). Her father was King Anna of East Anglia. She and some of her other sisters all retired from secular life to have religious life and were founders of abbeys. Despite initially being persuaded to marry she did so on the basis of wanting to remain a virgin and got her husband to agree to it. After his death she went to Ely. She again resisted a second political marriage, again insisting on remaining a virgin. Various legends say she was forced to marry but ran away and was protected by other nuns. Another legend is that her body did not decay after death.

In today's world a vow to remain a virgin (celibate) for the sake of service to God is to many people a strange and "unreal" calling. It's something that many have done since early times in the church. It is recognized as a special vow of self-dedication and complete surrender to God. To live such a life requires community and such communities also often held all their wealth in common. They have been founded specially for a greater commitment to prayer and also often for mission, teaching and as hospitals or refuges for the poor and special need.

Henry VIII got rid of most of the Catholic monasteries and abbeys in England. They were later re-founded and since the later 1800's the Church of England re-established some of its own traditional communities with various roles based on the Rules of St Benedict and St Francis and others.

What is important still is the value of consecrate singleness, the special self-dedication for a complete life of service. Maybe that also says something of the value of single people and widows in all walks life.

24. Weds. The Birth of John the Baptist (part 1) – Conception and Birth

Today we celebrate the Birth of John the Baptist. (More rightly called the Baptizer)



From the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 1

{In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah. His wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶ Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John}.

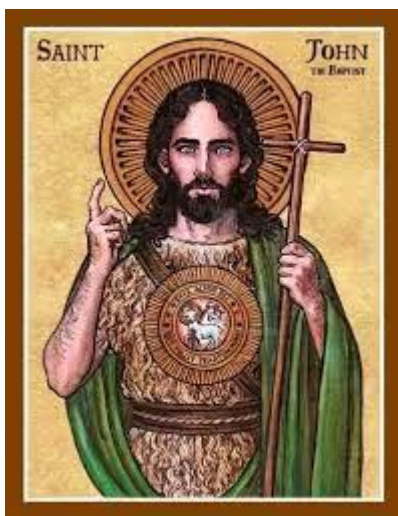
If a couple are unable to have children we know it can be an experience that may make them disappointed but medical knowledge may be able to help them have baby by more artificial means, bringing sperm and egg together outside the womb and then implanting it back into the mother. We know the reason for the failure of natural conception could be due to faulty sperm from the father, or faulty eggs, or problems with implanting in the womb or growing to term. All this was of course unknown in the time of Zachariah, and any failure to bear children was always seen as fault of the women and she was rather nastily called "barren". It was a social embarrassment in a culture that celebrated having offspring as heirs, the more the better. For a priest and his wife it would have been an even greater embarrassment.

Today we know a great deal more about the characteristics of sperm and egg and how they fuse to create the foetus and its development into a growing bundle of cells that then leads to cells differentiating into cells for the various organs and limbs of the body. We may

understand in some cases why it may go wrong and fail to proceed or lead to deformities and eventual handicaps. I say “sometimes” because we do not always know. All the chemical interactions in the cellular bundles that lead to organised development are not known. There is then the whole mystery of the development of the cells of the brain for form networks that will play a part in memory and the whole mystery of the development of individual personality.

Think about and pray today about the mystery of life and the ways that things that may go wrong. Lift up to God any particular circumstance you may know of.

25 Thurs. The Birth of John the Baptist (part 2) _ -His destined role



Today we think a bit more about the birth of John the Baptizer

From Luke chapter 1. At his birth his father Zechariah sings a song. Part of it is this..

⁶⁸ “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel because he has come to his people and redeemed them

⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David

⁷⁶ And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven ⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace”.

It is important that Luke says Zechariah sang this song under the influence of the Spirit of God (Holy Spirit). The Jews had not accepted that anyone since the prophet Malachi, about 400 years before, had the Spirit of God rest upon them. What is beginning in the life of Zechariah and in his son John is the new era in which God is speaking again with fresh voice and vision. John will be a new prophet for the new era. It will include his pointing to Jesus as the greatest presence of God in the world, as the Saviour who pays the price for our sins, and indeed Jesus receives a special presence of the Holy Spirit with Him too, and gives the

Holy Spirit to all His disciples. The new ear of the Spirit has come and nothing will ever be the same again.

It was the ancient role of the prophet to address all high and low in society to bring to them the authentic voice of God, to address where people have gone wrong and call them back to their destiny as the Children of God, renewed in themselves and all their relationships with others. This John would start and Jesus would continue and bring to a climax, and which the Spirit is still doing in us and others to bring everything to completion. We too have both the power to see and do what is right, to address what is wrong and point to the better and more complete way. To speak, to protest and to encourage.

There is a real potential that to us to the Spirit says "And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins"

25. Friday. Ember Day

Today we consider the tradition of Ember Days and what they mean.

In the western church an Ember Day is a day reserved for special prayer and fasting. Along with Lent is to be a day of some sacrifice of our resources and needs, to give instead back to God and others. Ember days traditionally comprise the Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday following St Lucy's Day (13 December), the first Sunday in Lent, Pentecost (Whitsun), and Holy Cross Day (14 September), but other days may also be observed.

They are then further days of self-reflection and self-dedication, where in giving up time or something, we give it to God. The purpose of their introduction into the church calendar was to thank God for the gifts of nature, to teach people to make use of them in moderation, and to assist the needy. It is also a time of praying for our joint ministry with others to continue the work of Christ. Here are some prayers for Ember Day

Lord Jesus, you said to your disciples:

‘You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you’ Lord, have mercy.

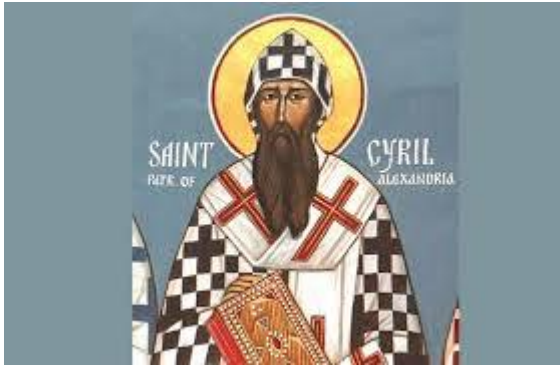
Lord Jesus, we know that the harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few. Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you appointed us to go and bear fruit that will last. Lord, have mercy.

Almighty God, you have entrusted to your Church a share in the ministry of your Son our great high priest:

Inspire by your Holy Spirit the hearts of many to offer themselves for the ministry of your Church, that, strengthened by his power, they may work for the increase of your kingdom and set forward the eternal praise of your name; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

26. Sat. Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria. c. 376 – 444



Today we celebrate the life of Cyril of Alexandria (ca 376-444 AD), Bishop of Alexandria and Theologian.

Cyril began his career as Bishop of Alexandria by showing himself to be an ill-tempered, quarrelsome, hasty, and violent man. He shut up some churches of those he did not agree with and quarrelled with the imperial prefect Orestes. Does not seem a promising start for a bishop.

On the other hand he became a great defender of orthodox Christian teaching in a controversy over the relation between Christ's Divinity and His Humanity. He combatted a view by Nestorius, who spoke of Jesus as a sinless man in whom the Spirit of God fully dwelt, but suggesting that the difference between Jesus and any other good man was a matter of degree. Cyril wrote learnedly and with great logic and conviction against the Nestorian position, and was largely instrumental in getting it condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. He also emphasised that as Jesus was truly God as well as Man that we should honour his mother Mary as "Mother of God" and that was also agreed at the Council of Ephesus.

Afterwards, surprisingly in view of his earlier record, he worked to reconcile the orthodox and Nestorian churches, and to bring many of the less extreme Nestorians back into the fellowship of the church. Maybe then in the intervening time from his induction as bishop, Christ and Holy Spirit mellowed him while he tried to maintain his convictions.

We may hope that all our church leaders are people of charity as well as people of conviction and searching to maintain the truth. Maybe we too can get caught in our own feelings about truth that may make us impatient with others. The spiritual balance of truth and charity is something we all need.

Heavenly Father, whose servant Cyril steadfastly proclaimed your Son Jesus Christ to be one person, fully God and fully man:

Keep us, we pray, constant in faith and worship; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.