

S.P.A.C.E

Wednesday 21st April 2021

If you walk round Canterbury Cathedral you will see several references to St Alphege in the cathedral's stained glass, such as the one depicted below. He is not very well known – in fact of the three saints commemorated in the lectionary this week, all of whom have a strong association with this country (Anselm, 21st April; George, 23rd; and Alphege himself, 19th), he is the most obscure although he was the only one of the three born in this land.

When Canterbury was attacked and sacked by Viking raiders in 1011, Alphege and other citizens considered to be good material for ransom were abducted and taken prisoner. The stained glass window depicts this incident. The ransom for the other prisoners was paid but Alphege was considered a valuable property by his captors, so the ransom demanded for him was the extortionate sum of £3,000 - a small fortune in those days.

After seven months in prison and fully aware of the potential consequences of his action, he continued to refuse to pay and forbade others to pay on his behalf. Not only was the idea of paying ransom money an offence against his sense of justice but also he knew that the sum demanded would leave the local population destitute. He was attacked by his captors and murdered in Greenwich. He died a martyr, not for professing his faith in words but for justice, putting the needs of his own flock before his own self-protection.

Unlike the later saint-Archbishop commemorated this week (Anselm of Canterbury), Alphege did not leave a body of Christian writing. (Anselm was one of the the greatest contributors to Christian thought between the time of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas). Instead his legacy was to show just how seriously he took the passage from John's gospel included on this week's insert. He laid down his life for his flock.

Alphege was the first of five Archbishops of Canterbury to be murdered while in office. Just over 150 years later the second, Thomas Becket, referred to Alphege in his final sermon on the Sunday before he himself was slain. The popularity of the later saint soon eclipsed that of Alphege, who became a footnote in history now remembered principally through a few panels of stained glass, but still an addition to the great cloud of witnesses referred to by the writer of Hebrews.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. (Hebrews 12:1,2)

Prayer

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the good things we enjoy in our earthly life:
the beauty of the created world;
the joy of family life;
the warmth of good friendships and the support of a friendly community;
for personal successes in activities which are important to us;
for answered prayer;

...and above all for the sure and certain hope of the life to come.

Lord of life

Hear us as we pray.

We pray for those who are unable to enjoy life in all its fullness:
for the sick and those who care for them;
for those affected by the restrictions of lockdown;
for those who live in poverty;
for those who are burdened by worry;
for those who live in fear of war or terrorism;
for those who are denied the freedoms we enjoy.

May they find hope when life seems burdensome, empty or without hope.

Lord of life

Hear us as we pray.

We pray for those whose work brings hope and healing to others:
for doctors, nurses and paramedics;
for those who work in hospices;
for clergy and counsellors;
for aid workers and those who work in the charitable sector;
for benefactors and donors;
for all who bring love and laughter into our world.

May their lives and work be an example of the loving care you offer to us all.

Lord of life

Hear us as we pray.

Finally we pray for the less visible people who keep life running smoothly:
for those who do the unglamorous jobs
that ensure our cities and countryside are clean and wholesome;
for those who maintain law and order and administer justice;
for those who draw up policies and work in administration,
to help order society for the common good.

Lord, help us not to take them for granted.

Lord of life

Hear us as we pray.

A prayer for the Queen

Most merciful God,

whose wisdom is beyond our understanding,
surround the Queen and the Royal Family with your love,
that they may not be overwhelmed by their loss,
but have confidence in your goodness,
and strength to meet the days to come.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

And Communion

A moment to reflect on the times when we have not been loyal to God and His ways and have not cared for others.

In God's holy presence we call to mind our need for forgiveness.

Silence

**Father, our sin has brought you sorrow,
has harmed those who share our life,
has been hurtful to ourselves.**

**We dare not say we have only lightly sinned;
Yet Christ has taken to himself the burden of it all.**

In Jesus name may we be freed from the penalty and power of sin. **Amen.**

God of love and wonder, we sing your praises: with the great company of people,
past and present, here and everywhere. We adore you, saying

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

You are indeed holy, eternal God and Father; in love greater than we can imagine
you gave your only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not die but have

eternal life. Not as we would, but as we are able, we praise and thank you for the reality of his birth, the glory of his humanity, the generosity of his life: for his sacrifice on the cross, the wonder of his resurrection, and the assurance that he lives for ever to save us; for the gift of the Holy Spirit, for our calling to be his people, for the hope all can find in him.

Remembering his life and sacrifice

**we now come to his table
as he has invited us to do.**

**Send to us now, we pray, the Holy Spirit
so that we may indeed be your people,
and that as we share the bread and wine
we may share in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Amen**

Please wait in your seats as Pete will bring communion to us

Ending

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

The blessing

God grant to the living grace, to the departed rest,
to the Church, the Queen, the Commonwealth
and all people, unity, peace and concord,
and to us and all God's servants, life everlasting;
and may the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always. **Amen**

The next SPACE service in church will be on Wednesday May 5th.

The service sheet will also be posted online.

The abduction of Alphege (Aelfheah)



A stained glass window from Canterbury Cathedral

The Good Shepherd

¹¹ ‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ ‘I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.’

(John 10: 11-18)