

Reflection Monday Easter Week 3 St Alphege of Canterbury 2021

St Alphege (- 1012) became a monk at Deerhurst, Gloucestershire, about 970, and eventually Abbot of Bath. In 984 he became Bishop of Winchester where he was known for his personal austerity and almsgiving. The king sent him to parley with the Danish raider Anlaf, and this he did with such success that Anlaf never raided England again.

In 1005 Alphege became Archbishop of Canterbury. The Danes were raiding once more and in 1011 they besieged Canterbury and captured it. Alphege was imprisoned and an enormous ransom was asked for his release, which he forbade to be paid. On 19th April 1012, at Greenwich, his captors, drunk with wine, and enraged at ransom being refused, pelted him with bones of oxen and stones, till one of them, called Thurm, dispatched him with an axe. He was buried in St. Paul's and by his death he became a national hero.

As an act of reconciliation Canute, in 1023, translated the body to Canterbury where it was buried near the high altar. Later Lanfranc confirmed the cult, and had a Life and Office written in his honour. Thomas Becket just before his death commended his cause to God and Alphege.

In the readings for the day, Acts speaks of the martyrdom of Stephen and, in the Gospel, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. Both are relevant to Alphege who cared for his people especially the poor and went out of his way to help them like the good shepherd that he was. In the example of St Stephen, he put his life on the line and became a hero for the people thus strengthening their faith even more. Because of the many saints like Alphege, we are free today to celebrate our faith. Let us ask his help that we, too, be willing to put our lives on the line to help those in need and to live and defend the faith in Christ on whom our whole lives are built. St Alphege pray for us.