

Reflection Wednesday Week 1 St Aelred of Rievaulx 2022

Aelred was born in Hexham about 1109. His family was well connected and he was sent into the service of King David of Scotland and eventually became the Master of the Royal Household. Although attracted to religious life, he also liked the life he lived at court as well as King David. After considerable personal struggle, he gave up his secular pursuits and entered the Cistercian monastery of Rievaulx, Yorkshire, in 1133. At 34 he took charge of a new foundation in Lincolnshire but returned to Rievaulx as Abbot 4 years later where he remained for the rest of his life. He died in 1167.

Aelred is remembered for his energy and gentleness. His writings and sermons revealed a deep love of Scripture and a personal love of Christ *'as friend and Saviour'*. He was sensitive and understanding in dealing with his fellow monks. Under his direction the monastery at Rievaulx grew to an extraordinary size. His health was far from robust and he suffered considerably in his last ten years. As Abbot he visited monasteries in England, Scotland and France despite the physical suffering and exhaustion incurred. He often lay helpless on his bed unable to speak or move for an hour after celebrating Mass. Aelred was a singularly attractive figure of great spiritual power clothed with warm friendliness and humanity. He was called the St Bernard of the North.

Like Samuel Aelred said *"Speak Lord, your servant is listening, I have come to do your will!"* In doing so he won over many hearts and lives to Christ. His care and love for his fellow religious cost him much suffering. His love of Jesus and his desire to fulfil the will of Jesus enable him to overcome his health difficulties. It could be said that he embraced suffering in order to free others from that challenge and to bring them good health just as Jesus did in the Gospel.

My doctor asked if anyone in my family is suffering from mental illness... I said, ***"No doctor, we all seem to enjoy it"***.