

## Reflection Thursday Week 11 St Richard of Chichester 2022

**St Richard of Chichester (1197-1253).** Richard Wych was born at Droitwich (then known as Wych) about 1197 to yeomen farmers. His parents died while he was still at school and, because the estate was badly managed, Richard, his brother and his sister were left almost penniless. Richard eventually brought the farm back on its feet by sheer hard work. Richard, however, wanted to join the clergy, but not necessarily the priesthood. Entering Oxford, he joined the school of Edmund Rich, the future archbishop of Canterbury and Saint. Edmund had a profound influence on him. Their friendship was lifelong. After graduating in Law, Richard studied in Paris and Bologna. In 1235 he returned to Oxford and was elected Chancellor.

Edmund, now Archbishop of Canterbury, asked Richard to be his Chancellor. For the next three years Richard lived and worked with Edmund and grew to revere him for his pastoral concern, his devotion to prayer, and his asceticism. In 1240 he accompanied Edmund on a visit to Rome, and was at his bedside when he died.

Now, in his early forties, instead of returning home from Rome, Richard went to Orleans to study theology, and two years later was ordained priest. Returning to England, he served as a parish priest in Kent. In 1244 the see of Chichester fell vacant. Henry III, instructed the Chapter to elect Robert Passelewe, which they duly did, even though he was a thoroughly unsuitable candidate. Archbishop Boniface of Canterbury decided to make a stand against the practice of royal appointment to episcopal sees, and quashed the election, nominating to Chichester Richard, his Chancellor. The King's refused to accept the homage of Richard, or to release to him the "temporalities" (the property and income) of the see, legally held by the Crown during an interregnum. Richard appealed to the Pope, who upheld his appointment and consecrated him bishop in Lyons on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1245.

When Richard came to Chichester to take possession of his see, the gates of the city closed against him and access to his estates barred, by order of the King. He was given lodging by Simon, the Rector of Tarring, who became a lifelong friend. Richard began his work from the Rectory at Tarring. He visited assiduously the parishes, monasteries and homes for the sick and poor in the diocese. After 16 months the King relented, under threat of excommunication by the Pope, although he refused to restore the income accrued to the royal treasury during the dispute. Richard took possession of his Cathedral amid great rejoicing.

Focusing on reforms, Richard instituted diocesan synods expounding the teaching and laws of the Church and local statutes enacted. Sacraments were to be administered without payment, Mass was to be celebrated in a dignified manner, clergy must practice celibacy, observe residence and wear clerical dress. There were instructions regarding the hearing of confessions, and clergy were reminded of their duty of hospitality and care of the poor. He also made provision for their proper payment and security of tenure. The laity were obliged to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, and know by heart the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary and the Creed.

To fundraise and maintain the Cathedral, Richard revived the practice of "Pentecostals", directing all parishioners to visit the cathedral church once a year at Whitsuntide and pay their dues. Those who lived too far away could fulfil this duty at Hastings or Lewes, and those unable to attend at all must still hand in their dues.

Richard was extremely hospitable and kept a good table; though he himself was frugal. He practised penance, wearing a hair shirt until his death. He was a man of compassion, with particular concern for handicapped children and convicted criminals. Miracle stories were

told about him – the out-of-season flowering of a fruit tree at Tarring, good advice to men fishing on the bridge at Lewes, resulting in an exceptional catch.

In 1252 the Pope appointed Richard to preach the Crusade. The Bishop saw this not just as a means of raising money but as a call to renewal of life. He toured the south coast reaching Dover where he consecrated a cemetery chapel for the poor, dedicated to St Edmund, the chief inspiration for his own life's work. A few days later he collapsed, leaving this prayer: *"Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits thou hast bestowed on me, for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me. And thou knowest, Lord, that if it should please thee I am ready to bear insults and torments and death for thee; and as thou knowest this to be the truth, have mercy upon me, for to thee do I commend my soul."* He died on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1253. His body was brought back to Chichester, where he was immediately hailed as a saint. He was canonised within the decade, and his body placed in a new shrine behind the High Altar, where it remained until destroyed at the Reformation.

Today Richard is honoured as a Saint and patron of Sussex.

**There were two evil brothers** who were rich and used their money to keep their ways from the public eye. They even attended the same church and looked to be perfect Christians. When their pastor retired, his successor saw right through the brothers' deception. He spoke well and true and the church started to swell in numbers. A fund-raising campaign was started to build a new church.

Suddenly, one of the brothers died. The remaining brother came to the new pastor the day before the funeral and handed him a check for the amount needed to finish paying for the new building.

"I have only one condition," he said. "At his funeral, you must say my brother was a saint." The pastor gave his word and deposited the check.

At the funeral, the pastor did not hold back. "He was an evil man" he said. "He cheated on his wife, abused his family, swindled his friends and the poor..." After going on in this vein for a small time, he concluded with "But, compared to his brother, **he was a saint.**"