

## Reflection Thursday Week 1 St Aelred of Rievaulx 2023

Aelred was born in Hexham around 1109. His family was well connected and he was sent into the service of King David of Scotland. He rose to the position of Master of the Royal Household. He became attracted to the religious life, but was too attached to court life and to King David himself. After considerable personal struggle he gave up his secular pursuits and entered the newly founded Cistercian monastery of Rievaulx in Yorkshire in 1133. Aged 34 he took charge of a new foundation in Lincolnshire. But within four years he returned to Rievaulx as Abbot where he remained for the rest of his life. He died in 1167.

Aelred is remembered for his energy and his gentleness. His writings and his sermons were characterised by a deep love of Scripture and a very personal love of Christ '*as friend and Saviour*'. He was sensitive and understanding in his dealings with his fellow monks and under his direction the monastery at Rievaulx grew to an extraordinary size. He did not enjoy robust health. The last ten years of his life was marked by a long and painful illness. As Abbot he travelled on visitation to monasteries in England, Scotland and France. The physical suffering and exhaustion incurred was considerable. A contemporary account of the last year of his life describes him as being left helpless on his bed unable to speak or move for an hour after celebrating his morning Mass. Aelred was a singularly attractive figure, a man of great spiritual power but also of warm friendliness and humanity. He has been called the St Bernard of the North.

Aelred responded to the request of Hebrews by encouraging his fellow religious to avoid their hearts becoming *hardened* by the lure of sin. He encouraged them to remain co-heirs with Christ right to the end.

**Overheard: As a young man just starting out, I was very poor. But I never gave up. And today, after many years of hard work and perseverance..... I am old.**