



St Arcadius of Mauretania

Arcadius lived in North Africa in the time of the Roman Empire. The Roman authorities were very suspicious of Christianity. It really annoyed them that more and more people kept becoming Christians despite being told they mustn't. They couldn't see what the attraction was, so they were sure it had to be something very sinister and dangerous. Besides, if the pagan gods stopped being properly worshipped, wouldn't that bring down bad luck on everyone? So from time to time there was a crackdown, and everyone would be summoned to appear in front of the magistrate and burn incense to the Emperor. Christians who were serious about their faith would always refuse to do that, even if it meant being tortured and put to death.

Arcadius did what most sensible Christians did if they got fair warning of trouble coming up: he left his nice home in the city and went to live in a remote part of the countryside. It was like being on a retreat: he had plenty of peace and quiet to pray, and he made the most of that. Unfortunately he was quite a prominent local figure, so the magistrate noticed when he didn't turn up for the incense-burning ceremony. Soldiers were sent to his house, and because they couldn't find him they arrested one of his relatives, loaded him with chains and threw him into prison. The

relative couldn't have betrayed Arcadius' location even if he'd wanted to, because nobody knew about the secret hiding place.

Roman prisons were horrible, and when Arcadius heard the news all he could think of was getting them to let the other man go, so he returned to give himself up. Nevertheless he refused to burn the incense, insisting that divine honours are due to God alone – not to the state or to its government. The magistrate went berserk and ordered the executioners to kill him – but to do it very, very slowly and make him suffer. So the executioners started by cutting off his fingers and toes, and then carried on gradually cutting bits off. Arcadius just kept praying and said that being able to sacrifice his fingers and toes, arms and legs like that made him feel more than ever that he belonged to God. The crowds who were watching were very impressed by his courage, and he took the opportunity to announce the Gospel to them. There was no need to worry about the pagan gods because they weren't real. Instead, he urged everyone to turn to the one true God who could give them genuine happiness. As for himself, he was filled with joy at being chosen to suffer and die for the one true God, and he was looking forward to receiving an everlasting crown in heaven.

Relics of St Arcadius were given to Guardian Angels Church, Mile End, to be placed under the new altar for its consecration on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8th December 2021.