

Dear all

Today is St George's Day – quite a puzzle for Hagiologists (writers about saints) and English patriots alike. Essentially, we don't have much information at all about this saint. The person who we think we're talking about was probably a Roman soldier, possibly of Greek descent, having been born in Cappadocia (in modern Turkey) with possibly a Syrian mother. He may have been executed, possibly in the Diocletian persecution (which particularly focussed on soldiers), possibly in the Roman province of Palestine (now in Israel). As a soldier-saint, he was considered a particularly powerful patron, fighting against the forces of evil; hence the development of the legend of his fight against the dragon. He is a particularly popular saint for the Eastern Orthodox church, as well as being a powerful prophet in Islamic tradition.

His connection with England came about through the veneration by Crusader soldiers, who discovered his cult in the Holy Land. He became popular with English kings. Edward I (1272-1307) had banners bearing the emblem of St George (a red cross on a white background) and Edward III (1327-77) had a strong interest in the saint and owned a relic of his blood. It was under his reign that St George became the patron saint of England. The St George cross however was not used to represent England until the reign of Henry VIII.

He was one of the very few saints whose feast survived after the English Reformation. However, his status was reduced, in Pope Pius XII's 1955 calendar, to "Simple", and in Pope John XXIII's 1960 calendar to a "Commemoration". Since Pope Paul VI's 1969 revision, it appears as an optional "Memorial".

In addition to England, St George is also the patron of Georgia, Ethiopia, Spain (particularly Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands and Barcelona), Portugal, Brazil, Russia, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro; the cities of Beirut, Genoa, Milan and Bologna; agricultural workers, farmers, field workers; soldiers; archers; armourers; equestrians, cavalry (particularly the United States Cavalry!), saddle makers; chivalry; skin diseases, lepers and leprosy, syphilis; sheep and shepherds.

There is an irony, with this background, that he and his flag should have been taken up by extreme right-wing groups in the last few decades.

Previously in England Saint Edmund (martyred by the Vikings) had been considered the patron saint of England, although his veneration had waned since the time of the Norman conquest, and his cult was partly eclipsed by that of Edward the Confessor.

The veneration of saints, and the practice of having patron saints has almost disappeared amongst the general population, and the Church of England has a rather ambivalent attitude. For most people they remain simply as good examples, though there are still many who do pray for the intercession of saints for particular reasons.

I wonder what we at DSJ think about saints – has anyone a particular story they would like to share? Is there a particular person (official saint or not) who has a particularly saintly quality for you? And who do you think should be the patron saint of England? Scotland, of course, has adopted one of the apostles, St Andrew; and Ireland has St Patrick (who was possibly Welsh or even possibly Breton!). Wales is the only part of the British Isles that has an indigenous saint in Dewi Sant (St David).

For the last couple of days, the reflection from St Paul's Cathedral has been given by Dr Gemma Simmonds CJ, on prayer during lockdown.

Jesus meets us where we are: using our imagination in prayer (1)



Life has got a lot more plain in lockdown. There tends to be a lot less external stimulus.

Without traffic and noise, things have got quieter, nature has drawn closer. Without people and the normal routines of life that bring us close to them our own thoughts have become louder and more insistent.

Perhaps daydreaming or worry has taken over - the luxury or the danger of living more in our imaginations. That's not real, we say, so it shouldn't intrude into the serious business of getting on with life.

But St Ignatius of Loyola took the imagination very seriously. He believed that our imagined dreams or anxieties, hopes or fears are the deepest reality of our lives. Often the busyness with which we cram our hours is an escape mechanism from the deep desires or fears that lie at our core. He believed that if we allow ourselves to respond to Jesus through our imagination, we will come to discover our deepest and best desires. It is those very desires that will lead us to God.

In his life on earth Jesus had transformative encounters with people. No one ever left his presence unchanged: blind beggars, Roman centurions, political leaders and harassed parents met him and were changed. Jesus is alive now. Can you spend some of this time directing your imagination to meet him now? Take time to enter into a gospel story with your imagination, picturing yourself in the scene, and you will find your emotions and desires engaged. The encounter may be unexpected, but he meets us where we are. It's not a question of forcing things. Relax and allow the scene to play out and let yourself participate in whatever way comes to you. Hear him ask, 'what do you want?' This is the moment to tell him.

Speaking to God as one friend to another: using our imagination in prayer (2)

Sitting still in imaginative contemplation of a gospel scene may take some people time and practice. Something practical: writing or drawing or going for a walk may work better. 'That's not prayer', you may say. Why not, if it leads your mind and heart to God?

Perhaps there's a letter you want to write to God or a poem. Perhaps you had a moment of quiet and some important thought came to you, or a deep feeling that you know you need to reflect on, and perhaps turn into action. Perhaps there's been some longing that won't go away or a dream that seemed important. Taking time to sift this, writing it out, drawing it, or using any other medium to make something that seems to symbolise what is at the heart of this feeling or these thoughts, all of this is prayer. It can lead to a deeper understanding of who we are before God and ways in which God is inviting us to grow in faith, hope or love. It's about getting in touch with our deepest desires, and finding God in and through those desires.

It may be responding to an invitation to dare to take our longings seriously, to get round to something we've been avoiding for ages, to forgive ourselves at last for something that has been weighing us down. Whatever it may be, any exercise that helps us to go deeper, to get in touch with our deepest desires, will lead us in the Spirit towards that treasured creature God created us to be.

And what do we do when we've discovered these deep desires? We take time to speak to God as one friend to another. It's the speaking out that can help us to identify God's presence deep within, inspiring, provoking, encouraging and reassuring. God is at work. The adventure lies in finding out how.

Chris Brown has uploaded another part of Vierne's Organ Symphonie 3, the Adagio, played with the sampled Cavaillé Coll organ at Caen - St. Etienne. Chris' notes say "This is Vierne in Wagnerian mode. No

apology for the slight liberty with the tempo – thought I might stretch it to 10 minutes but didn't quite make it!" I found it a lovely reflective piece.

<http://www.contrebombarde.com/concerthall/music/38843>

I've been a great fan of the Welsh comedian Max Boyce for many years. Probably his most famous album is 'Live from Treorchy', which was where my father was born. This is a beautiful and very moving poem from him:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQy67Y6Ytfg>

Finally, for those who had a go at Nick Fawcett's 'who said that' quiz, the answers may be found at the following link:

<https://nickfawcett.uk/2020/04/21/answers-to-who-said-that-quiz-2/>

If you didn't catch the original questions, and want to have a go, the link is:

<https://nickfawcett.uk/2020/04/20/quiz-time-who-said-that/>

Stay safe

Blessings and love

Mark