**SAINT ALBAN’S DAY, 2020**

Today is a red day … a day on which we honour a saint … St Alban, first martyr in Britain, and who was made Patron Saint of the Liberal Catholic Church at the GES in 1981. So while this is also a week in which we should give thanks for John the Baptist, the first Christian martyr who was also beheaded, this week, we celebrate St Alban’s enormous faith. So with thanks to Wikipedia … and hence all the other sources down Christian history who have contributed to this … may I comment …

Alban lived in Roman Britain, but little is known about his religious affiliations, socioe-conomic status, or citizenship. According to the most elaborate version of the tale found in Bede's [*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesiastical_History_of_the_English_People), in the 3rd or 4th century, Christians began to suffer "cruel persecution", and Alban was living in Verulamium.

However, [Gildas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gildas%22%20%5Co%20%22Gildas) says he crossed the Thames before his martyrdom, so some authors place his residence and martyrdom in or near London.

Both agree that Alban met a Christian priest fleeing from persecutors and sheltered him in his house for a number of days. The priest, who later came to be called *Amphibalus*, meaning "cloak" in Latin, prayed and "kept watch" day and night, and Alban was so impressed with the priest's faith and piety that he found himself emulating him and soon converted to Christianity.

Eventually, it came to the ears of an unnamed "impious prince" that Alban was sheltering the priest. The prince gave orders for Roman soldiers to make a strict search of Alban's house. As they came to seize the priest, Alban put on the priest's cloak and clothing and presented himself to the soldiers in place of his guest.

Alban was brought before a judge, who just then happened to be standing at the altar, offering sacrifices to "devils", references to pagan gods. When the judge heard that Alban had offered himself up in place of the priest, he became enraged that Alban would shelter a person who "despised and blasphemed the gods," and, as Alban had given himself up in the Christian's place, Alban was sentenced to endure all the punishments that were to be inflicted upon the priest, unless he would comply with the pagan rites of their religion.

Alban refused, and declared, "I worship and adore the true and living God who created all things." (and these words are still used in prayer at St Alban's Abbey).

The enraged judge ordered Alban to be scourged, thinking that a darn-good old fashioned flogging and whipping would shake the constancy of his heart, but Alban bore these torments patiently and joyfully. When the judge realized that the tortures would not shake his faith, he gave orders for Alban to be beheaded.

Alban was led to execution, and he presently came to a fast-flowing river that could not be crossed (believed to be the River Ver). There was a bridge, but a mob of curious townspeople who wished to watch the execution had so clogged the bridge that the execution party could not cross.

Filled with an ardent desire to arrive quickly at martyrdom, Alban raised his eyes to heaven, and the river dried up, allowing Alban and his captors to cross over on dry land. The astonished executioner cast down his sword and fell at Alban's feet, moved by divine inspiration and praying that he might either suffer with Alban or be executed for him.

The other executioners hesitated to pick up his sword, and meanwhile, Alban and the group went about 500 paces to a gently sloping hill, completely covered with all kinds of wild flowers, and overlooking a beautiful plain. Author Bede observes that it was a fittingly beautiful place to be enriched and sanctified by a martyr's blood.

When Alban reached the summit of the hill, he began to thirst and prayed God would give him water. A spring immediately sprang up at his feet. It was there that his head was struck off, as well as the head of the first Roman soldier who was miraculously converted and refused to execute him. However, immediately after delivering the fatal stroke, the eyes of the second executioner popped out of his head and dropped to the ground, along with Alban's head, so that this second executioner could not rejoice over Alban's death.

In later legends, Alban's head rolled downhill after his execution, and a well sprang up where it stopped.  Upon hearing of the miracles, the astonished judge ordered further persecutions to cease, and he began to honour the saint's death. St Albans Cathedral now stands near the believed site of his execution, and a well is at the bottom of the hill, known as Holywell Hill.

SO now you know all about St Alban. Right ? But what was Alban about really ? Yes, he was super-impressed with the piety and devotion of this priest he sheltered. And yes, so much so … he was prepared to swap places, knowing full well he might not survive a simple change of cloaks.

It seems our own Bp Charles Leadbeater, CWL as we refer to him, when putting on his highly-regarded clairvoyant hat, noted that Alban was indeed, still with us. In writing about CWL, Greg Tillett on page 173 describes a Master, called The Count, and this person has also been incarnated at Francis Bacon, Proclus, Roger Bacon, and … St Alban.

This person is the Head of the Seventh Ray, and is in charge of ceremonials … which was and still is very important for the work of the new church. All the ceremonial aspects you see me do … have a reason for being, and it’s only when you understand these that you gain a deeper insight, the kind that Alban gained so quickly. Hence his role.

And so there’s a lot more to it … it’s about Alban’s preparedness for the future … cos he was totally committed … so sure of his future with his new-found Lord. So certain, he didn’t try to duck the issue … no … indeed, he dried up the river so they could all cross over safely to his Golgotha … his place of execution … to actually hasten the event.

He demonstrated real certainty, and with this, is our certainty … or not. We too have a future. A future full of possibilities and responsibilities … for ourselves, for our growth in Our Lord, for those we love, indeed, for the planet itself. We have a future, and we need to invest in it.

We need to learn more about Our Lord, and not just have a superficial understanding of him. As Paul said … when I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child. Now I am a man, so I have put away child-ish things … I’ve taken on the responsibilities of maturity, and this means that for us, we need to learn how to look behind the written Gospel stories and other works, to discover what is really there, to open our hearts. And take responsibility.

I’d like to close with the words of the Most Rev Rowan Williams, the previous Archbishop of Canterbury, when in his discussions on St Alban some years back, and in developing this expansive view of Christian responsibility further, he uses Alban’s welcome and protection of a priest he’d never met to talk about our responsibilities to the stranger – a lesson that rings all too familiar as we watch what’s happening at our borders. He concluded by saying this:

*Were Alban ever to be recognised as the patron saint of this country, an issue which I am told is much discussed in these parts, were Alban ever to be so recognised, perhaps it would be a way of reminding our whole society, of the terrible dangers of misunderstanding loyalty and solidarity and the immense exhilarating and rather terrifying gift of being given the possibility of opening our lives, our hearts, our homes and our economies … to strangers.*

*And perhaps we could overcome that deepest and most disturbing of contemporary pathologies, that terrible fear of the refugee, the helpless stranger in our midst, that so distorts so much of our social and political life…*

*Our lives must be structured around that kind of prayerful hospitality which today, tomorrow and the day after is willing to be open to those whom God give us to be with … and to be here for. If only we’ll listen.*

So we give thanks for Alban, and for all those who open their hearts and doors and lives to others and take responsibility … like he did so long ago.

And now to God + the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, be ascribed as is justly due, all honour might majesty power and dominion, now henceforth and forever more. Amen.