

April 3 - Richard of Chichester (c1197 – 1253)

Ever wonder where the prayer ... 'May I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly, day by day' comes from? Richard of Chichester, a bishop in the 13th century, wrote it.

He began life as Richard de Wych, of Droitwich, the son of a yeoman farmer. But Richard was a studious boy, and after helping his father on the farm for several years, refused an advantageous offer of marriage, and instead made his way to Oxford, and later to Paris and Bologna to study canon law.

In 1235 he returned to Oxford, and was soon appointed Chancellor, where he supported Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, in his struggles against King Henry III's misuse of Church funds. After further study to become a priest, Richard was in due course made a Bishop himself. He was greatly loved. He was charitable and accessible, both stern and merciful to sinners, extraordinarily generous to those stricken by famine, and a brilliant legislator of his diocese. He decreed that the sacraments were to be administered without payment, Mass celebrated in dignified conditions, the clergy to be chaste, to practise residence, and to wear clerical dress. The laity were obliged to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days, and to know by heart the Hail Mary as well as the Lord's Prayer and the Creed.

Richard was also prominent in preaching the Crusade, which he saw as a call to reopen the Holy Land to pilgrims, not as a political expedition. He died at Dover on 3 April 1253. In art, Richard of Chichester is represented with a chalice at his feet, in memory of his having once dropped the chalice at Mass! One ancient English church is dedicated to him.

And, of course, he is author of that famous prayer, now set to popular music, which runs in full:

'Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ for all the benefits thou hast given me, for all the pains and insults which thou hast borne for me. O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother, may I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly and follow thee more nearly, day by day.'

The image is of the Icon of St Richard, painted by Sergei Fyodorov for the Dean & Chapter of Chichester.

April 9 - Palm Sunday: Holy Week begins

This year, Easter Day falls on 16 April. The week leading up to it, which begins with Palm Sunday on 9 April, is very special in the church year, and is known as Holy Week.

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday, the day when the Church remembers the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The gospels tell us that he had gone up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and that when he entered the city; the crowds gave him a rapturous welcome, throwing palm fronds into his path. On this day churches worldwide will distribute little crosses made from palm fronds in memory of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem.

Maundy Thursday focuses on one of the final acts concerning Jesus to be related in John's Gospel – the washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus. The ceremony of the 'washing of the feet' of members of the congregation came to be an important part of the liturgy (regular