

ST PIUS X WEEKLY REFLECTION

Saints and Place Names (1 of 6)

Saint Alban

This week we consider St Albans, a cathedral city in Hertfordshire. It takes its name from the first British saint, Alban.

Alban was a Roman citizen of Britannia who lived in the village of Verulamium in the third century. As a Roman citizen, he was required to follow the Roman religion. Christians suffered harsh persecution at the time. In the face of this unjust persecution, Alban provided shelter to a Christian priest for several days. Observing the priest's piety and devotion, Alban, incredibly moved, converted to Christianity.

When Roman authorities arrived and searched for the priest, Alban donned the priest's cloak, allowing the cleric to escape. The priest is known as Amphibalus, after the type of cloak he wore. However, this swap ensured Alban's subsequent arrest. Soldiers brought Alban before a Roman magistrate, who compelled him to renounce Christianity and abide by the Roman pagan rites. However, Alban refused and professed,

"I am called Alban, and I worship and adore the true and living God who created all things."

Alban then endured severe torture and received the sentence of beheading. On June 22, likely sometime between 250 and 259 A.D., Roman soldiers led Alban away to a nearby hill for his execution. Spectators crowded a bridge on the road that led to the execution site. Legend recounts that Alban miraculously caused a river to divide, granting him and his captor's passage.

Amazed, one of the executioners fell at Alban's feet. He asked that he could either take Alban's place or die alongside him. When they reached the hillside, which was covered with wildflowers, his fellow soldiers beheaded the new convert alongside Alban. At the same time, the eyes of the soldier who decapitated Alban allegedly popped entirely out of his head, depriving him of joy in Alban's death. In dying for his refusal to reject the gospel, Alban became England's first recorded Christian martyr.

Alban's Example

In this relatively short account of him, Alban sets quite the model for Christian living. He exemplifies hospitality, evangelism, and faithful obedience to Christ unto death.

Hospitality

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me. [Matthew 25:40](#)

Alban's hospitality is on full display even before his conversion, as he opens his door to the persecuted priest at significant risk to himself. Like the Caananite Rahab sheltering the Israelite spies, Alban takes in one of God's chosen—a Christian—and is forever changed, ultimately redeemed by the encounter. His hospitality reminds us that when the Lord presents us the chance to welcome a stranger, we are to welcome them as Christ himself.

Evangelism

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"...but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..." [1 Peter 3:15](#)

When brought before the magistrate, Alban boldly proclaimed his faith in the living God of scripture, rejecting the pagan gods of Rome. His faithfulness to Christ and the power of God displayed through him even claimed the heart of one of his executioners. Finally, he willingly laid down his life for the sake of Christ.

Obedience

"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it". [Matthew 10:39](#)

Alban could have saved his own life by surrendering the priest he was sheltering to the authorities. He could have saved his own life by choosing to reject Christ and obey the Pagan rites. Again, he did not. He could have even allowed the spectators crowding the bridge to block the way to his execution. All this he could have done, but he didn't. Alban had, in such a brief time, learned that the promise of Christ was greater than all the promises of this world.

Alban's Legacy

Because of his steadfastness for Christ amid persecution and the threat of execution, Alban quickly became a hero of the faith, particularly in Great Britain. Verulamium eventually became St. Albans, with the hill on which the saint died becoming the site of a monastery, St. Albans Abbey. The abbey, in turn, would later become St. Albans Cathedral. It has been a site of pilgrimage for the Christian faithful for centuries. Many churches across the world, likewise, bear his name. He stands as a reminder of the radical change God can bring about in a person's life and the way he may use even the most ordinary among us in a brief time.

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