

Grapevine Prayer Diary Integrated Notes for February

A month including a number of saints widely known, about whom little seems known in fact, and where characteristics of the time of year seem to contribute. Readers are encouraged to scroll through every month's Notes at its beginning as, in the great web of commemoration, it often happens that more than one in a given historical strand is called to remembrance in the same month (to whom, for this month, we can add Sts. Richard (7) and his daughter, Walburga (25), who will be found elsewhere noted, with other family members, in a 7 July entry for Willibald).

1: Brigit, or Bride (c. 525), abbess of Kildare.

2: The Presentation of Christ in the Temple and Purification of St. Mary the Virgin, or 'Candlemas' (St. Luke 2:22-39: counting the forty days of the 'accomplishment' (Leviticus 12) from Christmas), when in old English custom (according to the seventeenth-century priest and poet, Robert Herrick) the greenery of box succeeded Christmas decorations; the American 'Groundhog Day' weather-lore (emerging to see his shadow signals 6 more weeks of winter) has European roots involving larger hibernating animals (and British parallels).

Collect from the *Book of Common Prayer*: "Almighty and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that, as thy only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

3: Blasius, or Blaise: bishop and martyr, since a late Life tells how he saved a boy near death from a fishbone in his throat, is especially asked to pray for people to be delivered from ills of the throat.

Also, Anskar (865) who was born near Amiens and educated at Corbie, Picardy, where he became a monk. Going to New Corbie (Corvey) in Westphalia, he began his apostolic work. King Harold of Denmark had, in exile, become a Christian, and returning home, took St. Anskar with him to evangelize. The Swedish king, Bjorn II, also had him come preach. He was made Bishop of Hamburg, and, after its sack by Vikings in 845, of Bremen. Pope Nicholas I gave him legatine jurisdiction over Denmark, Norway, and Sweden as well. After his death, his work well begun came largely to a stop for nearly two centuries. But his devotion of adding short personal prayers to each psalm was soon widespread.

Also, Ia, who gives her name to the Cornish Porth Ia ('Ia's Harbour') and to its English name: St. Ives. (Other forms include 'Eia' and 'Hya'.) Different mediaeval accounts report her to be a missionary from Ireland and sister of St. Erc(us) (31 Oct. in Cornwall, 2 Nov. in Ireland), converted by St. Patrick with St. Barricus as her teacher: they are connected with St. Gwinear (23 Mar.), as well. She also gives her name to Plouyé in Brittany, to which other accounts say she and her brother travelled.

4: Gilbert of Sempringham (1189), son of an English mother and Norman father, who gave him two churches in his desmesne, though a layman – he appointed a vicar while living in voluntary poverty himself and giving the whole revenue of one of these church properties to the poor. One bishop of Lincoln made him his household clerk, his successor also consecrated him priest, so that, inheriting from his father, he was at once squire and parson of Sempringham. Building a house for 7 devout young women of the parish and giving them a rule based in that of St. Benedict, he began what would prove the Gilbertine Order, the only Order founded by an Englishman. Lay sisters were added, and then lay brothers to labour for all of them. St. Bernard helped him draw up Institutes of the

Order, which came to have canons following the Rule of St. Augustine while the lay brothers followed that of Cîteaux. Eventually, he built nine double monasteries, with four more for canons, with leper hospitals and orphanages, as Master travelling from one to another, working with his hands as builder, furniture-maker, and copyist. In 1164, the Gilbertines incurred the displeasure of Henry II by helping Thomas Becket escape dressed as a lay brother, but Gilbert, though making no secret of his support for Thomas, obtained pardon and immunity for himself and his Order from the king. The Order survived until all its houses, by then over 20, were suppressed by Henry VIII.

5: Agatha, virgin and martyr of Catania in Sicily, since a late Life tells that as part of the unsuccessful torture to get her to renounce Christ, her breasts were cut off, is especially asked to pray for people to be delivered from ills of the breast, and, from a resemblance in shape, for bell-founders.

6: Amand (c. 675), after 15 years as a hermit in Bourges, at around 45 years old, became a missionary bishop in Flanders and among the Slavs along the Danube, and was for a while bishop of Maastricht, also founding various religious houses, including at Elnon where, as abbot, he died at around 90 years of age.

8: Cuthman (8th c.) was a shepherd, who, when his father died, made a wheelbarrow couch for his paralyzed mother, so they could go about together, he begging his way as a mendicant hermit. Coming to Steyning (West Sussex), he build them a hut – and, with the help of their neighbours, went on to build a wooden church. In the words of Butler, ‘His name was rendered famous by many miracles of which God was pleased to make him the instrument, both living and after his death.’ St. Edward the Confessor (1066: 13 Oct., and 5 Jan.) gave the church to Fécamp Abbey, in Normandy, and it established a cell of monks, there, while, after the Norman Conquest, a stone church was built, and St. Cuthman’s relics were transferred to Fécamp. Attwater says, ‘The memory of this forgotten saint was revived by Christopher Fry in his one-act play *The Boy with a Cart*’ – his first professional work, commissioned by the vicar of Steyning in 1938, revived in a 1950 professional production directed by John Gielgud and starring the young Richard Burton.

9: Teilo , a sixth-century monk and bishop, whose work was centred on Llandeilo Fawr in Dyfed, Wales, is the subject of many ancient church dedications throughout south Wales, and also in Brittany, but no reliable early accounts of him survive.

10 (2 Dec. in the East): in 681, Trumwin (c. 704) was made Bishop among the Picts by St. Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury (690: 19 Sept.), with his see at Abercorn, in land recently conquered by the Northumbrians. He was the only Bishop ever of this Diocese, as the Picts reconquered it in 685, with his monks and him fleeing before them. He went to Streaneshalch (later renamed ‘Whitby’ by successful Danish invaders), where he helped the abbess, St. Elfleda (714: 8 Feb.), who had succeeded her widowed mother, Queen St. Enflada (c. 704: 24 Nov.), there. The Venerable Bede (735: 25/26/27 May) reports she “found in him extraordinary assistance in governing, and comfort to herself” while he “led a life in all monastical austerity, not only to his own, but to the benefit of many” (*Ecclesiastical History*, IV, 26). Bede came to know him, and, in his Life of St. Cuthbert, reports him as one of its sources, and relates how St. Trumwin had gone with King Egfrid and “many other religious and influential men” to convince St. Cuthbert (687: 20 Mar.) to accept the See of Lindisfarne, to which he had been unanimously elected in a synod presided over by St. Theodore.

13: Ermengild (c. 700) was the daughter of Erconbert, King of Kent, and St. Sexburga (c. 699: 6 July), and niece of Sts. Etheldreda (679: 23 June), Ethelburga (664: 7 July), Saethrith (10 Jan.), and

Withburga (743: 17Mar.). St. Ermengild married Wulfere, pagan King of Mercia, and converted him: they had two children, King Coenred (who abdicated in 709 to go on a pilgrimage to Rome, where he became a monk for the rest of his life), and his sister, St. Werburga (c. 700: 3 Feb.). After the death of Wulfere (674), St. Ermengild became a nun at Minster-in-Sheppey, founded by her mother. When St. Sexburga resigned as abbess and went Ely, to succeed her sister, St. Etheldreda, St. Ermengild became abbess at Minster. When St. Sexburga died some 20 years later, she succeeded her at Ely, to be succeeded in turn by her daughter, St. Werburga. Dr. Farmer notes 'Ermengild's cult was extensive, and that St. Werburga's 'relics were translated to Chester in the late 9th or early 10th century, because of the danger from Danish armies': after another translation in Chester (21 June 1095), her shrine was a centre of pilgrimage till destroyed under Henry VIII.

14: Valentine, martyr: the (late mediaeval) custom of choosing, and of calling oneself, a 'Valentine', may derive from birds pairing around this date.

15: Sigfrid (c. 1045), was a missionary bishop sent from England, who is considered the second apostle of Sweden, after St. Anskar, but (in the words of Attwater) 'particulars of his work are confused and uncertain.' He may have been the one who baptized King Olaf Skotkonung of Sweden. His cult is also strong in Denmark.

16: Elias and companions (309), Egyptians martyred when, returning from kindly accompanying Christians sentenced to forced labour in the quarries of Cilicia from their faith, they were stopped for questioning at Caesarea Maritima, and, giving their names as Elias, Jeremy, Isaias, Samuel, and Daniel and their city as (the heavenly) Jerusalem, they were tortured to death in an unsuccessful attempt to extract more information.

20: Wulfric (1154: also 'Ulfric(k)') was born at Compton Martin, some eight miles from Bristol, and became a priest, first at Deverill, near Warminster – as a 'hunting parson' (Attwater), 'much addicted to hunting with hawks and dogs' (Farmer) until, at around age 40, (in Farmer's words) 'converted to a more austere life [...] reputedly through a chance conversation with a beggar.' He then ministered at Compton Martin till 1125, when he became an anchorite, for the last 29 years of his life permanently enclosed in a cell in the parish church of Haselbury Pluckett, not far from Exeter, where, on a vegetarian diet, he spent much of his time reading the Bible, reciting psalms, and praying, as well as working at copying and binding books and making other things useful for the church. His reputation for holiness, including a gift of prophecy, attracted royal visitors: King Henry I and Queen Adela came in 1130 and obtained the healing of a paralyzed knight by his intercessions, while three years later, he prophesied Henry's approaching death to him, meeting his anger with 'I have not spoken from myself', and, when Stephen visited him, (in the words of Farmer) he 'greeted him as king even before his disputed accession' – but later, also boldly 'reproached him for misgovernment' when the occasion called for it.

23: Polycarp (c.155: also 26 Jan.) had in his youth "known John and others who had seen the Lord" according to St. Irenaeus (c. 200: 28 June, 23 Aug., in the East). His older contemporary, St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (c. 107: 17 Oct., and 17 & 20 Dec.), on his way to martyrdom in Rome, first visited, and then wrote encouraging him, as Bishop of Smyrna. Later, St. Polycarp visited St. Anicetus (161: 16, 17, 20 April) in Rome to discuss the date of celebrating Easter: they ended up agreeing to differ in charity over their two traditions. Back in Smyrna, he was hunted down as a Christian. When asked by the proconsul to recant, he said he had "been Christ's servant for 86 years and He had never done him any wrong" and offered to teach him "the Christian doctrines" at his convenience. He was bound

on a pyre to be burnt alive , but the fire arched round him, so he was stabbed to death. Those who wanted to bury him were refused and mocked, and his body was burnt. But the Christians of Smyrna reported in a letter to other churches “we afterwards took up his bones, as being more precious than the most exquisite jewels, and more purified than gold, and deposited them in a fitting place, whither, being gathered together, as opportunity is allowed us, with joy and rejoicing, the Lord shall grant us to celebrate the anniversary of his martyrdom”.

24: Matthias (also 14 May, 9 August): the Apostle chosen by lot to replace Judas among the Twelve (Acts 1: 15-26).

28: Martyrs of the plague of Alexandria: Christians who, in the words of St. Dionysius (c. 262: 17 Nov.), during an epidemic “visited the sick fearlessly, and looked after them without stint, serving them in Christ” and being “happy to die with them”.

Also, Oswald (992), of Danish descent, who was educated under his uncle, St. Odo, Archbishop of Canterbury (958: variously 2 June, 29 May, 4 July), who sent him to the Cluniac abbey of Fleury to learn monastic discipline after serving some years as a canon of Winchester. He returned as priest, and on the recommendation of St. Dunstan (988: 19 May) followed him as Bishop of Worcester (961) by appointment of King St. Edgar (975: 8 July). With Sts. Dunstan and Ethelwold (984: 1 Aug.) he promoted monastic revival, founding Westbury (near Bristol), and then Ramsey, from which Evesham and Pershore were founded. He invited St. Abbo (1004: 13 Nov.) from Fleury to Ramsey where Byrthferth was among his students, ‘whose mathematical, scientific, and homiletic writings’ (in the words of Dr. Farmer) ‘made him one of the most notable Anglo-Saxons’ of his century. St. Oswald went on to become Archbishop of York (where he had once worked under another archiepiscopal uncle, Oskytel). Throughout his life he built churches and worked to improve the standard of parish clergy. In 991, he revisited Ramsey to reopen the church after the collapse of a tower, then went to Worcester for the winter, washing the feet of 12 poor men and serving them at table each day during Lent, and, on 28 February, dying as he completed this task, while singing the Gradual Psalms (120-34).

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