



Liturgical Resources

Tuesday 21 April 2020

Anselm

Archbishop of Canterbury

Teacher of the Faith

Anselm was born in 1033. After some years of undisciplined life he entered a monastic school in Normandy. In 1060, influenced by Lanfranc, prior of the abbey of Bec, Anselm took monastic vows. Three years later he succeeded Lanfranc as prior and in 1078 became the abbot of the monastery.

On a visit to England he renewed his acquaintance with Lanfranc, who had become archbishop of Canterbury. On Lanfranc's death in 1089, Anselm was proposed to succeed him, but King William II would not at first consent. There was considerable conflict at the time over the respective powers of the monarch and the church with regard to appointments, responsibilities and accountability. Not only did it take until 1093 before Anselm was consecrated archbishop of Canterbury, but he spent much of his episcopate in exile from England because of the strife first with King William II and then with Henry I over the issue. Despite the time and energy taken up by this conflict, Anselm succeeded in initiating far-reaching reforms in the church in England, including the holding of regular synods and a renewed emphasis on the celibacy of the clergy. He died in 1109.

Anselm was by nature a scholar and a monk and devoted to prayer. He is best remembered for his theological work. He made a significant contribution to theology through his development of the so-called "ontological argument" for the existence of God: "God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived." A thing existing in reality is greater than that same thing conceived of only in the mind; therefore God must truly exist.

Anselm also, in his most famous work, *Cur Deus homo* (Why God became human), gave classic expression to the "satisfaction theory" of Christ's work. He explains it in terms of feudal society: when a vassal breaks his bond with his lord, satisfaction must be made. In our relation to God, we cannot make satisfaction because of our sinfulness, therefore God, in human perfection in Christ, offered satisfaction for our sin.

Behind Anselm's scholarly theology lay a profound piety. He was less interested in "proving" God's existence or explaining Christ's work than in helping Christians give a coherent account of the faith by which they live. Faith and prayer always came first. In one of his early theological works he wrote:

I do not try, Lord, to attain your lofty heights, because my understanding is in no way equal to it. But I do desire to understand your truth a little, that truth that my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe, but I believe so that I may understand. For I believe this also, that "unless I believe, I shall not understand."

Sentence

Whoever approaches you, O God, must believe that you exist and that you reward those who seek you.

Hebrews 11:6 (adapted)

Collect

Eternal God,
source of all wisdom,
you enabled your servant Anselm
to teach the church of his day
to understand its faith in you;
enable us now through your grace
to give a reason for the faith that is in us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Psalm

71:1-8

Readings (for Tuesday in Second week of Easter)

Acts 4:32-end

John 3:16-21

