

April 19th

Diocesan Memorial of St Alphege, bishop and martyr

Born in 953, St Alphege was about 17 when he entered the monastery at Deerhurst, Gloucester. He was appointed Abbot of Bath by St Dunstan, and was then, in 984, made Bishop of Winchester. As bishop he earned a reputation both for the austerity of his own life and for his generosity to others. In 994 he took a leading role in the negotiations with the Danish raider, Anlaf, which brought a temporary end to Danish raids on England, and the conversion of Anlaf to Christianity.

Alphege was made Archbishop of Canterbury in 1005. In 1011 Danish raids on England recommenced and the Danes laid siege to the city of Canterbury. Alphege himself was taken hostage. His captors demanded the considerable ransom of £3,000 for the Archbishop but Alphege refused to pay this himself and forbade anyone else to raise the money on his behalf. He was held hostage for over seven months, until finally, frustrated and angry, the Danes murdered the Archbishop in Greenwich. He was buried in St Paul's, a national hero.

In 1023 in a gesture of reconciliation, King Canute, King of England from 1016 and of Denmark from 1018, had Alphege's body translated to Canterbury where it was buried with due honour near to the high altar.

As St Alphege had not died as a martyr for the faith the appropriateness of his cult was questioned by Lanfranc (Archbishop of Canterbury — 1070-1089). St Anselm, who was to be Lanfranc's successor at Canterbury, argued that as St John the Baptist had been a martyr for truth so St Alphege had been a martyr for justice.

Entrance Antiphon:

Light for ever will shine on your saints, O Lord, Alleluia.

Opening Prayer

Lord our God
you have honoured the Church
with the victorious witness of Saint Alphege.
As he imitated the sufferings and death of the Lord,
may we follow in his footsteps and come to eternal joy.
*We make our prayer through Jesus Christ your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.*

Prayer over the gifts

Lord,
accept this offering of praise and peace
in memory of your martyr, St Alphege.
May it bring us your forgiveness
and inspire us to give you thanks now and for ever.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Communion Antiphon

I tell you solemnly: Unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest, alleluia.

Prayer After Communion

Lord God,
we receive your gifts from heaven
at this joyful feast.
May we who proclaim at this holy table
the death and resurrection of your Son
come to share his glory with all your holy martyrs.
Grant this through Christ our Lord.