

1116] SAINT EDMUND OF ABINGDON, Abp OF CANTERBURY [16TH NOVEMBER, 2021]

Suggested Readings: *Ecclesiasticus 39:6 – 10; Matthew 13: 24 – 32. See S. Patrick*

Edmund was born about AD 1175, the son of a merchant of Abingdon. Aged twelve he went to study in Oxford, and spent the next thirty-five years as a student or a teacher there or in the University of Paris. It was a time of intellectual discovery, but also a time of difficulty in the English state and Church. King Richard had died in 1199, and his successor John managed to fall out with both civil and church authorities. From 1208 – 1213 England was under an interdict, with all sacraments, except infant baptism and absolution of the dying, prohibited. Civil war followed the breakdown of negotiations between king and barons. On John's death in 1216, his successor was his nine-year-old son, Henry III, who was himself involved in conflict with barons and bishops. In 1222 the bishop of Salisbury appointed Edmund as canon-treasurer of the cathedral, at a time when the cathedral was being rebuilt. Despite the burden of raising money, Edmund managed to continue his studies and maintained a disciplined life of prayer.

The archbishop of Canterbury died in 1231, and in 1233, after three attempts to elect a successor had been annulled, the Pope appointed Edmund as archbishop, despite his protests. His seven years as archbishop were probably not the happiest of his ministry. He was at once caught up in the political affairs of the realm, mediating between the king and a rebellious baron. The king was willing to use him, but at the same time, by getting the Pope to appoint a Legate, limited Edmund's primatial authority. The king also made a habit of leaving bishoprics and other posts vacant, so that he could claim their income. This too was a cause of friction between them.

Edmund – not alone among bishops – also faced opposition from the monks of his cathedral, whose right to elect an archbishop had been overridden.

Despite all this political and ecclesiastical opposition, Edmund one of a group of reforming bishops who sought to remedy the problems which had arisen during the reign of King John. Another was Hugh of Lincoln, whose feast falls tomorrow, and a third was Edmund's chancellor, Richard of Wych, later Bishop of Chichester (16th June).

Weary of the conflicts Edmund set out to appeal to the Pope, but was taken ill in France, and died on 16th November 1240. He was buried in the abbey of Pontigny, where his body still rests.