

(421) SAINT ANSELM, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY (APRIL 21ST, 2021)

Readings: *Ephesians 3: 14 – 19; Psalm 33 (34) 1 – 10; Matthew 7: 21 – 29.*

Anselm was born in Northern Italy in about AD 1033. From the age of fifteen he wanted to be a monk, but for some years his father's opposition delayed his entry into the religious life. At twenty-three he left home, and three years later, attracted by the reputation of Prior Lanfranc, moved to the abbey of Bec in Normandy. He became a monk of Bec in 1060, succeeded Lanfranc as prior, and was elected abbot in 1078, by which time Lanfranc had become Archbishop of Canterbury. From 1066 William, Duke of Normandy, was also King of England ("The Conqueror"), and this meant that the abbot of Bec became involved in the political and religious affairs of both territories. Anselm visited England several times and obtained from the king a charter confirming Bec's title to its lands in England. King William died in 1087 and was succeeded by his son William II ("Rufus"). When Archbishop Lanfranc died Rufus kept the see of Canterbury vacant for three years, wishing to take its revenues, and not wanting another strong archbishop.

Anselm was in England 1093 when the king, taken seriously ill, promised that, if he recovered, he would appoint Anselm as archbishop. When he recovered he again delayed the appointment.

Anselm was consecrated on December 4th, 1093, but the king and he continually disagreed.

In 1097 he left England to consult the pope about his future. The pope wrote to the king threatening excommunication if Anselm was not restored, but in 1100 William died (shot in the New Forest), and the new king, Henry I, invited Anselm to return. However, this was not the end of his troubles, as he was caught up in the Investiture Controversy about the right of kings to give newly consecrated bishops their symbols of office and to require homage from them. In 1103 he again appealed to the pope to settle the question, and remained in exile until a compromise with King Henry enabled him to return in 1106.

Apart from all his political struggles Anselm contributed greatly to the reform of the clergy, to devotion and to theology. He accepted that reason had an important role in theology, but insisted that faith must come first. He often quoted Saint Augustine's saying: *Do not seek to understand in order to believe, but believe so that you may understand.*

Anselm died on the Wednesday in Holy Week 1109 and was buried in Canterbury Cathedral.