

Readings: *Ezekiel 34: 11 – 16; Psalm 89 (88) 2 – 5, 21,22,25,27; Matthew 5: 1 – 12.*

Richard was born in Wyche (now Droitwich) in Worcestershire about 1197, the younger son of a substantial farmer. He went to study in Oxford but returned home to help his brother with the estate. Richard did this so well that his brother offered him both the estate and marriage to the heiress to whom he himself was betrothed: But Richard was set on becoming a scholar and returned to Oxford, where he eventually became a Doctor of Canon Law and Chancellor of the University. When Richard was nearly 40, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Edmund of Abingdon, appointed him to his household. In 1240 Edmund died in France while travelling to Rome in the hope of settling a dispute with King Henry III. Richard spent the next few years studying in France, where he was ordained priest, and was then recalled to serve the new archbishop. In 1245, after a dispute between king and archbishop, Richard was consecrated by the Pope as Bishop of Chichester. King Henry resented this appointment, wishing to appoint one of his own clerks, and withheld the property of the bishopric, so that Richard could not enter his episcopal house. Instead he lived with a parish priest and travelled – often on foot – through his large diocese, preaching, teaching, exercising pastoral care and correcting abuses among the clergy and the laity.

Late in his life he set out to preach the Crusade in Sussex and Kent. His journey finished in Dover, where he consecrated a chapel in honour of his former master, now Saint Edmund. In his sermon he asked for the prayers of the people because he knew his death was near. He died four days later, on 3 April 1253. As he had required in his will, his body was taken back to Chichester and buried in the chapel of S. Thomas & S. Edmund. Nine years later, on 22 January 1261, he was declared a saint, and on 16 June 1276 his body was translated to a shrine behind the high altar of the cathedral. Like others, his shrine was robbed and destroyed by order of Henry VIII, but in 1930, an altar was placed on the site of the shrine, and in 1990 a relic, probably from his arm, which had been preserved in Normandy, was given to the cathedral and interred beneath the altar. The first two lines of the popular 'Prayer of Saint Richard' appear in a contemporary account of his death: kissing an image of the crucified Jesus, he prayed: *I thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits you have granted me, for all the pains and insults you have suffered for me.*