

Readings: *2 Timothy 2: 8 – 13, 3: 10 – 12; Psalm 124 (123); John 12: 24 – 26.*

Alban, who lived in the early third century, is the first British saint of whom there is any record. He was a Roman citizen in the city of Verulamium, and (as Bede tells us) *while still a pagan he gave shelter to a Christian priest who was fleeing from his persecutors.* He was so impressed by the prayerful life of the priest that, *touched by the grace of God, he was...moved to emulate his faith and devotion,* and eventually *wholeheartedly professed the Christian faith.*

Soon the fact that he was sheltering a Christian became known, and men were sent to arrest the priest. Alban disguised himself in the priest's cloak and allowed himself to be arrested in his place. The magistrate, angry that the priest had been able to escape, demanded to know his prisoner's name and family. He replied that his name was Alban, and, refusing to name his family, said that he was a Christian and would not offer sacrifice to the Roman gods. Hoping to make him recant, the magistrate had him flogged, and when this had no effect, sentenced him to be beheaded. Alban was led towards the place of execution, which involved crossing a stream. His legend records that the stream dried up, which the appointed executioner regarded as a miracle and refused to perform his task. He and Alban were taken up the hill outside the city, and there they were both beheaded. Bede tells us: *Saint Alban suffered on the twenty-second day of June, near the city of Verulamium. When the peace of Christian times was restored, a beautiful church worthy of his martyrdom was built.*

This church will have been destroyed or abandoned during the Saxon invasion of Britain, but its site was known, so that in 793 King Offa of Mercia was able to found an abbey on the site.

After the Norman conquest the abbey church was rebuilt, and Saint Alban's shrine became a notable place of pilgrimage. The shrine – like most others in England – was robbed and destroyed under Henry VIII, but in the 19th century the remains of the tomb were rediscovered and have been rebuilt on the original site. It is again the focus of pilgrimage and prayer.

Pray for English Christians and their faithful witness to Christ in our own day.

Among the roses of the martyrs, brightly shines Saint Alban.