

Saint of the Month for April 2013

(A monthly series compiled by Tom Quinlan)

Saint Anselm, Bishop and Doctor of the Church **Sunday, April 21**

Saint Anselm is known as the “Father of Scholasticism” or “Father of Scholastic Theology” and was a very influential theologian and philosopher (more about this below.) He was born about 1033 in Aosta, in what is now the Piedmont region of Italy. He desired to become a monk at age fifteen, but the abbot he applied to did not accept him, sensing his father’s opposition. This seems to have pleased his father, who did not want him to pursue a religious vocation.

Anselm then lived a worldly life, which he constantly repented of in later years.

He moved to the Benedictine monastery at Le Bec in Normandy, where he became a pupil, disciple, and friend of the abbot, Lanfranc, as well as a monk in 1060 at the age of twenty-seven. Three years later Lanfranc became the abbot at another location, and Anselm became the prior at Le Bec. He was known for his kindness and his patience, especially in dealing with those who opposed him. As a philosopher focused on metaphysics he surpassed all Christian doctors since Saint Augustine. While at Le Bec, he wrote his *Monologium*, in which he gave metaphysical proofs of the existence and nature of God, and his *Proslogium*, or contemplation of God’s attributes. He wrote treatises on other important subjects, and spent about 30 years at Le Bec.

In 1078 Anselm was chosen abbot of Le Bec, which led to him visiting England, where the monastery had property and where his friend Lanfranc was now the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Like St. Augustine, Anselm found himself pushed into a higher clerical role, becoming the Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of England in 1093, some years after the death of Lanfranc. St. Anselm spent time consulting with the pope, and stayed in Italy for a time to recover his health; he died among the monks of Canterbury in 1109.

He was quite modern for his time regarding the training of the young, telling others that freedom must be given to boys in their care, so that in later life they would do well.

There were many years of strife with the ruler of England, with disputes about the role of secular leaders and church leaders in the appointment of bishops and other clerics, and about the disposition of revenue from church property. For a time Anselm was in exile in Italy because of King William Rufus, but even though this ended, the next sovereign, Henry I, came into contention with Anselm despite a favorable start.

St. Anselm is remembered for a sympathy and sincerity which won him the affection of men of all classes and nationalities. He was one of the first to stand against the slave trade, and obtained a resolution at Westminster to prohibit the practice of selling men like cattle. The poet Dante accorded him a place in his *Paradiso*, where he is found among the spirits of light and power in the sphere of the sun, next to St. John Chrysostom.

Saint Anselm is believed to be still buried at Canterbury Cathedral at the chapel named after him.

His commemoration is given the rank of Optional Memorial, and is usually celebrated on his saint's day, April 21 (see below). (**Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition** (Scepter Publishers); Butler's **Lives of the Saints, 2nd edition** (Ave Maria Press))

Collect from the Mass of St. Anselm:

O God, who led the Bishop Saint Anselm
to seek out and teach the depths of your wisdom,
grant, we pray,
that our faith in you may so aid our understanding,
that what we believe by your command
may give delight to our hearts.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. (**Roman Missal, Third Edition**)

We are not all philosophers of his stature, but we can hope for some greater insights into the nature of God and assurance of His existence. Saint Anselm, pray for us!

“Scholasticism is a method of philosophical and theological investigation that uses analogy, definition and synthesis of these findings so as to penetrate the depths of revealed truth.” (**Catholic Dictionary, Revised Edition** (Our Sunday Visitor)) This method was used by many in the middle ages: St. Anselm was an originator, and St. Albert and St. Thomas Aquinas are well known scholars in this tradition.

This year we will not be celebrating the memorial of St. Anselm, as it occurs on a Sunday. In general, the Sunday celebration overrides commemorations from the Proper of Saints, but there are exceptions; for example, the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed (All Souls' Day) on November 2 is celebrated whether it is a weekday or a Sunday.