

One day an elderly man in Germany walked into a confessional box after feeling the urge that he needed to confess. He began, "Forgive me father, for I have sinned. During the war I hid a Jewish refugee in my attic." The Priest replied, "Well, that's not a sin my son, but rather a heroic act of great compassion and daring." To which the man continued, "Yes Father, but I made him agree to pay me 20 marks for each week he stayed." "Well," said the Priest, "I must admit, that wasn't a great decision, but I am sure you did it for a good cause." Somewhat relieved, the man then said, "God bless you father, that puts my mind to rest, though I just have one more question." "Yes my son?" asked the Priest. "Do I have to tell him that the war is over?"

Someone who was most definitely known for his compassion, though without charging for it, as far as we know at least, was our patron Saint Hugh, who we once again remember and celebrate today. Although whose actual day of celebration is the 17th November, the day of his death, which occurred on the return from yet another of his pilgrimages. Hugh was also known as Hugh of Avalon, since he was born there of French nobility in the province of Burgundy around 1140. From the beginning, it would appear that Hugh was destined for some form of clerical or cloistered life. This of course wasn't unusual for young males of the time, especially for at least one of the male heirs within families of title and wealth. For Hugh, this began at the age of eight when and after the death of his mother, both he and shortly after, his widowed father joined an Augustinian religious communal order.

It was there at the Canons Regular of St. Augustine at Villarbenoît, that Hugh received his formal education, and where at 15 he more earnestly began his ascetic and contemplative life as a novice monk. At 19 Hugh was ordained a deacon, and later became priested in his 20's, joining the Carthusian Monks around the age of 30. Hugh eventually became procurator of the Carthusian order at La Grande Chartreuse near Grenoble, France, before being sent to head up the first Carthusian house which he helped build, as prior/abbot in Witham Charterhouse, Somerset England. For his life of dedication and holiness, Hugh was consecrated bishop of Lincoln at Westminster in 1186, where he served until his death in 1200.

Raising the quality of education, generously charitable, defying injustices even from royalty, Hugh was known and widely venerated for his wisdom, justice and emphasis on ecclesiastical discipline. Hugh is also remembered for his many charitable works caring for and defending outcasts, the persecuted, and homeless. This is no more characterized than in his protecting many Jews who lived in Lincoln at the time from yet another Jewish persecution, which began with the commencement of the reign of Richard I. Hugh is also remembered for white swans, one of which took a particular shine to him during his episcopacy at Lincoln.

That said, Hugh wasn't without some lesser known though unusual partialities either. Such as going on pilgrimages to venerate and if need be, acquire, albeit without permission, certain relics of notable saints. One of note being the arm bone of Mary Magdeline located in the abbey of Fécamp in Normandy. Whereupon after said arm bone was unwrapped and then kissed by Hugh, he then tried to unsuccessfully slice a piece off for himself. Failing which he then bit two splinters off instead. Even his own relics weren't without some controversy. Enshrined at Lincoln cathedral, they served as a source of income to help complete the cathedral's reconstruction after it had been damaged by an earthquake in 1185. The shrine continued to be a welcome source of pilgrim donation and homage, until Henry VIII appropriated the riches which included gold, silver and precious stones in 1540, and during which Hugh's tomb was desecrated. What are believed to be the surviving relics of Hugh's remnants, though minus his head, now reside at St Hughs Charterhouse in Parkminster, which also houses the relics of St Boniface and the Virgin Mary.

Another interesting anecdote regarding Hugh, was that he actually got off his horse for a confirmation, which says more regarding episcopal practices of the day, as about Hugh's humility. Nevertheless, such was his

service to the church, that he was canonized a saint by Pope Honorius III in 1220. And why, today Hugh is remembered as the patron saint for sick children, sick people, shoemakers, and of course swans.

In all, it would appear that Hugh, like so many of the saints, took Christ's teachings and message of caring for the despairing and forgotten very much to heart. Much as our Lord was always availed to do, no matter the situation, circumstances, or inconvenience to Him. Showing unconditional love and compassion. Especially for those deemed unworthy of as much. Such as when interrupted by the blind man on his final journey to Jerusalem passing through Jericho.

Regarding the blind beggar, there is speculation that he could have been the same man as Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52). Especially as it was not uncommon for such ostracized folk to be found outside the village or town gates. As it wouldn't have been uncommon for someone in such wretchedness to be calling out to Jesus for help. More than calling out though, the Greek emphasizes that he was actually screaming. Understandable too, given all the noise and ado. And his desperate plight. Jesus was of course teaching as He was walking along, as rabbis or teachers of the law often did. Added to which, there would have been a cacophony of noise emanating from the many others who for one reason or another couldn't attend the Passover feast in Jerusalem, instead lining the road wishing those passing every blessing. So understandably why as many as possible were trying to hear everything He was saying. And most likely why those with Jesus responded with as little sympathy and compassion as they did to the persistent screams coming from the blind beggar.

Hats off to the blind beggar though for his dogged determination and belief that Jesus could and would restore his sight. And whose unwavering faith was rewarded. As much to our Lord's response too. Which was to underpin that we love our neighbour as ourselves. Irrespective who they may be. And in what circumstances they may find themselves. A reminder that while those present would have witnessed a man's physical sight being restored, they would have had their own bias and so spiritual vision opened too. Opened to the reality of putting Christ's teaching into action. And putting others first. No matter who is speaking and what we may miss out on hearing. For no matter what is said, actions will always speak louder.

It is equally an imperative reminder that we have our spiritual eyes opened to the spiritual reality that we are indeed not to be anxious about anything, but rather to let go and hand everything that disturbs or troubles us over to the Lord. Through prayer, supplication and thanksgiving. Trusting and believing that God does have the best outcome for us. And in the process knowing that we will indeed experience that peace that passes all understanding. O how so easily said than done. Which is no doubt why God allows us to experience the challenges and difficulties that from time to time we are called to traverse. To grow our reliance and trust in His very words. Even when things can appear so contrary. As are all who have and continue to trust in God and God's promises. Perhaps a fulfilling of what the Sage is encouraging in the apocryphal book known as the Wisdom of Solomon. Reinforcing the that no matter what happens in this life, and what or how others may ridicule us and our testing, we can hold fast to God's promises that we will overcome and have a future that can never be taken from us. As much a reinforcement too of the nascent first-century BC (BCE) notion there will indeed be an afterlife for those who similarly hold fast to our Lord's promises.

Once again more encouragement for our spiritual journeys with Christ. Of being reminded that we not give up on seeking (and perhaps at times screaming to) our Lord for His help, especially when times are tough, and seem to have no end. Where faith and trust build even greater faith and trust. Trust that we have a Saviour who has and knows exactly what suffering and difficulty are all about. And who was able to overcome as much even more so. As He is always availed to help us overcome too. Where no matter the inconvenience, we can compassionately prioritize others. Tested and so proven worthy to experience God's peaceful righteousness that we have the promise of eternal life with Him. As with all the saints and souls. As with the blind man. And as with our own St Hugh of Lincoln. To our Lord's glory. Amen.

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