

SAINTS IN GLORY (PART 1) Charles Jury

For the first time since the Book of Common Prayer was revised following disestablishment in 1871, the latest edition – BCP 2004 – has included in the Calendar a list of Commemorations of "persons associated with dioceses of the Church of Ireland" (BCP p.22). This is a return to the old custom of 'black letter' days, days of lesser importance, distinguished from 'red letter' days or festivals for which 'Propers' (i.e. special Collects and Readings) were provided. The custom of distinguishing days in the liturgical calendar by colour goes back before the Reformation, and was continued in various editions of the Book of Common Prayer, though not – interestingly – in the First, that of 1549 (authorised for use in Ireland in 1550). Four appeared in the Book of 1552 – which was never authorised in Ireland, others in later editions. They were included in the Book of 1662, the edition that subsequently came to be regarded as virtually normative of Anglican liturgy, and was the version "received and approved" by the General Convention of bishops, clergy and laity that was called to prepare the Church of Ireland for 'post-disestablishment' life. The early General Synods removed the 'black letter' days from the calendar, reverting to the 1549 practice of only making mention of 'scriptural' saints. It may seem rather amusing – or horrific! – to realise that no liturgical provision was made even for the observance of St Patrick.

This situation was a sad impoverishment for a church that claimed to be "the Ancient Catholic and Apostolic Church of Ireland". A better, and more scientific, historical knowledge of the history of our Church and country has, I hope, led to the realisation that Irish Anglicans are by no means the sole heirs of ancient Irish Christianity. It has also led to a more sensible understanding of our Irish heritage. In this context it is valuable to see in our new Prayer Book a commemoration of Irish saints, some purely local, others with wider significance.

Many readers will ask, "who are these people" that are listed on pp 22-23 of the Prayer Book. The introductory paragraph simply explains why they have been included in the Calendar. Some of them will probably be familiar, others are simply names, associated with particular dioceses or commemorated in the occasional parish church. I propose, over the next few issues of our News Sheet, to give details of their lives, which I hope readers will find interesting and valuable. I make no claim to original research or scholarship, and I rely heavily on already available sources.

One particularly valuable book for this purpose is *Commemorating Saints and others of the Irish Church* by the late George Otto Simms, with prayers by Canon Brian Mayne, the editor of BCP 2004. The idea for such a book first arose over fifteen years ago in 1988 when the Liturgical Advisory Committee of the General Synod was looking into the matter of commemoration of " 'worthies' of the Church of Ireland from the earliest times." This was only four years after the introduction of the Alternative Prayer Book

(1984) with its addition to the calendar of St Brigid. St Patrick had been added to the Prayer Book in the 1926 revision and St Columba by statute of the General Synod in the late 1960's. There was clearly a need felt on the committee to have a list of lesser commemorations for the Church of Ireland, even if not formally authorised by the General Synod. George Simms was asked to prepare what Bryan Mayne calls "an unofficial Irish supplement to the book *Cloud of Witnesses*". This had been compiled by the Alcuin Club and published by Collins as a "Companion to the Lesser Festivals and Holy Days of the *Alternative Service Book 1980*" in 1982. While *Commemorating Saints and others of the Irish Church* was not published until 1999, the biographical notes and collects passed into two books – *Exciting Holiness* and *Celebrating the Saints* – which provide liturgical material related to the calendars and Prayer Books of all four Anglican Churches of these islands.

BCP 2004 has two new Red Letter saint's days, both in October, and I shall start with them. In subsequent issues I will deal with the lesser commemorations.

19th March St Joseph of Nazareth

Sometimes commemorated as the Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Joseph is a rather shadowy figure. He features only in the early stories of Jesus' life, suggesting that he 'adopted' Jesus, thus ensuring his descent from David, that necessary Messianic qualification, and took him, with his mother, to be presented in the Temple. His humility and faithfulness were no doubt stressed by the author of Matthew's Gospel when he was prepared to avoid scandal when he discovered that his future wife was pregnant, and then accepted her and her child 'on trust'. The fact that he is not mentioned later in the Gospels, while there is mention of Jesus' mother and brothers, suggests that St Joseph may possibly have died. This would further be backed up by Jesus commending his mother to the care of the Beloved Disciple in St John's Gospel. It is nevertheless fitting that the Church should commemorate him, though it seems slightly out of place during the season of Lent, especially as two days before we have taken a day out from Lent to commemorate our national saint.

11th October St Philip the Deacon

St Philip was chosen, along with St Stephen, as one of the Seven deacons, whose function was to assist in the distribution of food to the Greek speaking widows in Jerusalem. Clearly this was not his only function, as he subsequently went to Samaria, where he preached and baptised, and afterwards went to Gaza where he converted and baptised the Ethiopian eunuch. That his ministry was subordinate to the ministry of the Apostles can be seen from the fact the Peter and John came to Samaria to lay hands on Philip's converts to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Such information can be gained from the Acts of the Apostles. Later tradition suggests that he became bishop of Tralles, in Lydia.

23rd October St James the Brother of Our Lord

This James, the third of that name to be commemorated in the Church of Ireland Calendar, was reputed to be the leader of the Jerusalem Church – its first Bishop. As to his exact relationship to Jesus, blood brother, step-brother or cousin, there is considerable controversy, fuelled to a great extent by 'theological' considerations surrounding the traditional Catholic belief in the Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. For those who prefer to avoid the controversy, the alternative title **St James of Jerusalem** would have been preferable. He was also a witness, according to St Paul, of the Risen Christ, which would suggest that, if he had been sceptical of Jesus' mission during his lifetime, he was now a convinced follower. There seems to be little doubt that he was closely related to Jesus, and his assumption of control of the community of believers in Jerusalem would be a natural move in Middle Eastern Society. He presided at the 'Council of Jerusalem' recorded in Acts which laid down conditions under which Gentiles could be admitted to the Church. According to Flavius Josephus, the contemporary Jewish historian and the most reliable historical source available, he, and some other unspecified persons, were accused by the Sanhedrin of being "transgressors of the law" and stoned to death. The Jewish authorities appear to have taken advantage of an interregnum in the Roman administration and acted beyond their powers, for the High Priest responsible was quickly removed from office and replaced.