

Hugh Bishop of Lincoln, d. 1200

observed November 17

Saint Hugh's fame in England was second only to Thomas Becket among the English Saints. His mother died when he was small, and his father retired to a monastery with his young son, who thrived in the monastic life. He was ordained while still a teen and soon after called to be Abbot of a nearby monastery. He later rose to prominence in Chartreuse, one of the most renowned of Carthusian monasteries. Thence he was sent across to England, to be prior of Witham in Somerset. This was the first Carthusian house in England, established by King Henry II as part of his penance for the murder of Thomas Becket. The King's penance had limited duration; and the poor monks were living in terrible conditions with no permanent buildings. Hugh was able to prevail on the King to make better provision for them and led the monastery for seven years, all the while admonishing Henry for his selfish appropriation of church revenues for his private purposes, aided in this especially by leaving many episcopal seats vacant. When the King finally acceded and called a council of bishops and barons to discuss the state of the church in England, Hugh himself was elected Bishop of Lincoln, one of the prominent dioceses which had gone without episcopal oversight. Hugh proved to be an exceptional bishop, focused on the well being of his people, always working among them and seeing to it that priests and officials appointed should be the best qualified and not interested only in personal advancement. Under his leadership education was greatly improved and the cathedral was restored from the damage suffered in the 1185 earthquake. The plans he commissioned (finished well after his death) turned this into the first Gothic cathedral in England. Hugh served under Kings Richard and John, acting as a diplomat in their relationship with France on a variety of occasions and personally instrumental in saving the large Jewish population of Lincoln from the violent persecutions under Richard. While at Lincoln, Hugh was befriended by a swan which was his constant companion when he was at home, and which remains his lasting symbol. Hugh was a saintly man, whose personal piety, consistent ethics, and gentle humor earned him the admiration and regard of king and commoner alike from his own day until ours.



lessons: Titus 2:7-8,11-14; Psalm 15; Matthew 42:24-27

collect: O holy God, you endowed your servant and bishop Hugh of Lincoln with wise and cheerful boldness, and taught him to commend the discipline of holy life to kings and princes: Grant that we also, rejoicing in the Good News of your mercy, and fearing nothing but the loss of you, may be bold to speak the truth in love, in the name of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen