

Saint of the Week: Aelred of Rievaulx (1109 – 1167)

Observed 12 January



Aelred was the son of a married priest in Northumbria. He served for several years at the court of King David of Scotland, where he prospered. When he was 24, he entered the Cistercian Order as a monk at Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire. He spent the rest of his life in this Order, sometimes traveling from house to house, including the more famous ones in France. He was an able leader and was Abbot of Rievaulx for 20 years, but is best known to us as a writer. One of his best known works, *The Mirror of Charity*, was written at the behest of his renowned contemporary, Bernard of Clairvaux. In addition to spiritual reflection and advice, he wrote several books of history, including a history of Saint Edward King and Confessor. Other works include *Rule of Life for a Recluse*, *Jesus as a Boy of Twelve*, *Pastoral Prayer*, *On the Soul*, *Genealogy of the Kings of the*

English, *Lament for the Death of King David of Scotland*, *The Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor*, *The Life of Saint Ninian*, *On the Saints of Hexham*, and *A Certain Wonderful Miracle*, as well as many sermons.

Although Aelred was typical of writers of his time in seeing all sexual activity as harmful to the monastic life with its vow of celibacy, his eloquent writings about friendship have captured the hearts and imaginations of many gay people in the church so that he has been claimed as patron for such organizations as Integrity, the official organization of LGBT members of the Episcopal Church.

Indeed, Aelred's *Spiritual Friendship* is filled with passages that have inspired Christians of many centuries to appreciate the holiness and beauty of what the Celts call Anam Cara, 'soul friends', individuals with whom we can share our spiritual journey toward God: "Friendship is a stage bordering upon that perfection which consists in the love and knowledge of God, so that from being a friend of our neighbors, we become the friend of God, according to the words of the Savior in the Gospel: 'I will not now call you servants, but my friends.'"

Lessons Phil. 2:1-4; Psalm 36:5-10; John 15:9-17

Collect Almighty God, you endowed the abbot Aelred with the gift of Christian friendship and the wisdom to lead others in the way of holiness: Grant to your people that same spirit of mutual affection, that, in loving one another, we may know the love of Christ and rejoice in the gift of your eternal goodness; through the same Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.