

Hilary of Poitiers (315-367)

Observed 13 January



Hilary was bishop of Poitiers (in the Roman province of Gaul) during the fourth century of the Common Era. This was the time of the furious controversy over the Trinity, exemplified by Athanasius and Arius. The divinity of Christ was the point at issue. Hilary was with Athanasius on the orthodox side, regarding Christ as fully divine along with the Father and the Spirit. Apparently he was extremely persuasive and so was a thorn in the side of the Emperor Constantius and other Arians who were trying to make their point of view the official doctrine of the Church. Raised in a pagan family, Hilary was extremely well-educated and it was through education that he became convinced of the truth of the Gospel. It is therefore not surprising that he was deeply concerned by heretical teachings spreading broadly through the Church and that he thought the way to combat such error was through sound teaching. When Hilary contacted the emperor directly to seek an end to persecution of orthodox Christians by Arians, the emperor exiled him to Phrygia. He spent four years there during which time he wrote powerfully on the controversy and continually sought open debate with his opponents, having total confidence in the rationality and force of the orthodox view. Eventually he caused such consternation that he was returned home to Poitiers. The last years of his life included some controversy, but also much time spent in writing thoughtful biblical commentaries, greatly admired by such followers as Augustine of Hippo. He was a man of vigorous mind and passionate devotion to the truth of the gospel who inspired people from his own day to ours.

Lessons Zechariah 6:9-15; Psalm 37:3-6,32-33; I John 2:18-25; Luke 12:8-12

Collect O Lord our God, who raised up your servant Hilary to be a champion of the catholic faith: Keep us steadfast in that true faith which we professed at our baptism, that we may rejoice in having you for our Father, and may abide in your Son, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; who live and reign for ever and ever.