

Phew! At last it's August and things can slow down a little. July was such a packed month following on from June's galas and club days, to yet more carnivals, summer fairs, afternoon teas and table top sales but now I'm looking forward to a slightly quieter time (please?). In our churches August is usually a quiet month with out any meetings, since we assume many people will be on holiday, and no major festivals as we are in that long period of time between Pentecost and Advent which some churches call 'ordinary time'. When there is not much to write about I often find myself going back to the traditional British obsession with the weather and this year during the past few weeks it has seemed determined to out do itself with record temperatures and long dry spells. But I really don't want to talk about the unusual and improbable British weather so I thought I'd write about 'improbable' saints instead.

One improbable saint who sounds very appropriate for summer is St. Serenus the Gardener. Born in Greece in the 4th century Serenus became an expert in horticulture. One day he came across the wife and daughter of a Roman imperial guard trespassing in his garden and asked them to return in the cool of the evening to see it better. They thought they had been told to get out and went off in a huff. The guard complained to the Emperor Maximian who found Serenus innocent of insulting the guard's wife, but just as he thought he was in the clear Serenus was invited to offer sacrifice to the Roman gods which he refused to do, so Maximian had him beheaded anyway. Serenus is therefore the patron saint of those who suffer imaginary slights.

Another couple of unlikely saints who might get very busy over the Bank Holiday weekend are St. Floridus and St. Laurus the patron saints of home improvements. They were 2nd century builders and interior designers working on a pagan temple in Illyria. Half-way through the job they converted to Christianity, smashed all the idols of Mithras and replaced them with crosses and other Christian symbols, which so annoyed the client he had them drowned in a well.

A saint you might have heard of is St. Sebastian who you have probably seen in paintings as the victim of a martyrdom which left him full of arrows. However he did not actually die that way. He was rescued by Irene of Rome who took him back to her house and nursed him back to health. Unfortunately when the Emperor Diocletian passed by Sebastian went out to harangue him, for which insult the emperor had him clubbed to death and his body thrown into a privy. This episode of his life has proved less appealing to artists.

St. Adelaide of Italy was a powerful 10th century figure who was regent of the Holy Roman Empire. She was the daughter of the King of Burgundy who married her off to Lothair, the King of Italy, who was then poisoned. She subsequently married the Holy Roman Emperor Otto the Great and wielded great influence until she was exiled by her daughter in law, Theophanu. Although they were later reconciled Adelaide is still celebrated as the patron saint of those having trouble with their in-laws.

These are just a few of the thousands of saints who have odd patronages or suffered unusual martyrdoms. Some of the stories are very entertaining, many quite gruesome, others very moving and many quite frankly unbelievable. But I suspect that the most remarkable stories of saints are those that go untold – the stories of ordinary people who kept the faith in their own quiet way, who stood beside the marginalised or those in need, who persevered against all the odds, who sometimes suffered greatly almost unnoticed, and yet triumphed over adversity. There are many such 'quiet' saints. You may know some of them in your own church or community, their achievements may not be great in worldly terms but they make a difference. Do you know anyone who fits that description?

We all have the potential to be one of those "quiet saints". This summer, during the quiet 'ordinary' time, let's try to make a difference and join the ranks of the "improbable saints"!

Janet.