

Dear Friend

The Lectionary tells us that we have a number of commemorations this week, including John Keble, both poet and priest, on Wednesday.

However, I am going to write about St Swithun who we commemorate on Thursday this week. The Lectionary tells us about him as follows:

Swithun was Bishop of Winchester from 852 until his death in 862. Little is known of his life that can be traced with historical certainty.

Swithun was born in Wessex, an area that was in the process of becoming the most influential of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and educated at Winchester Minster. He was chosen to become chaplain to Egbert, King of Wessex, and then was given the responsibility for the education of Egbert's son Ethelwulf.

He was subsequently appointed as Bishop of Winchester by King Ethelwulf when he was enthroned in 852. During the period of his office the kingdom of Wessex grew in reputation and influence throughout the land, despite Viking attacks. The post of Bishop of Winchester grew in importance and influence during the time of Ethelwulf's reign. Later legends give Swithun a reputation for compassion and evangelism, but it is his intellectual ability and learning for which he was first remembered.

On his death he was buried in a humble grave outside of the walls of the minster at his own request, and in 971, some 90 years later, his body was moved to a shrine within the cathedral. His commemoration in popular culture seems to date from this period rather than from his life. The translation of his remains was the occasion for a dramatic rainfall, which was taken to be a sign of his spiritual power. Miraculous events were also held to have occurred during the re-interment, and this added to the legends surrounding him. The belief that the weather on St Swithun's Day will hold for the following 40 days remains a popular legend today. (Extract from *Saints on Earth: A biographical companion to Common Worship* by John H Darch and Stuart K Burns)

We don't seem to need to pray for rain here at present as we are having unseasonably wet weather. But it does remind us to pray for those areas of the world where they are having very high temperatures and much less rain than usual. This does seem to be the result of human action in creating climate change, so I commend this prayer to you:

God of rain and river,  
of stream and storm,  
of sea and silent pools,  
of waterfall and waterhole,  
of wells and waves,  
of aquifer and aqueducts,

Hear us as we pray  
for water fresh and pure for all.  
And guide us to use your water  
wisely and well,  
ensuring that all your creation  
can share in your bounty. Amen.

(Ruth Williams)