

## **St John Chrysostom (347-407) 27<sup>th</sup> January**

St John was born in Antioch, heartland of early Christianity, and well educated in the standard professional skills of oratory and law. In his 20s he became a hermit monk but because of ill-health returned to the city and was ordained. He soon became an assistant to the Bishop, and renowned for his practical pastoral care and teaching. His preaching earned him the title "Chrysostom" – "Golden Mouth". In 397 Emperor Arcadius had him appointed as Archbishop of Constantinople, the Imperial capital. However, his very vigorous reform measures in the Church, and public denunciation of what he saw as the corruption of both public and private life earned him considerable enmity, particularly from the Empress Eudoxia. Charges brought against him by the Archbishop of Alexandria succeeded in having him banished, but he was recalled after an earthquake in Constantinople, only to be banished again in 404, although strongly supported by the Western hierarchy. While travelling into exile under harsh conditions he died on 14<sup>th</sup> September.

27<sup>th</sup> January is the date when, 31 years after his death, his body was returned to Constantinople.

In the West he is regarded as one of the four Greek Doctors of the Church (with Athanasius, Basil and Gregory Nazianzus); in the East he is one of the Three Holy Hierarchs (Religious authorities) (Basil, Gregory and John) celebrated on 30<sup>th</sup> January.

This c 870 mosaic of St John from Hagia Sophia in Constantinople is particularly appropriate, since his conflict with the Empress Eudoxia was fueled by her having a silver image of herself set up outside the church.



1447 of St John's sermons and 240 of his letters have survived; as a most important teacher it is not surprising that he is usually represented with a book or scroll. Many of his comments on wealth, and living simply, remain highly relevant today. A much circulated, but anonymous, icon format depicts St John "expounding" or "interpreting" the writings of St Paul, to the benefit of future generations.



### **St Thomas Aquinas (c 125 – 1274) 28<sup>th</sup> January**

Thomas was born near Aquino (Italy) and educated at the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino and then in Naples. However, when he proposed to enter the Dominican Order he was imprisoned by his family. He was attracted to the Dominicans by their intellectual approach. The Dominicans, or Order of Preachers, founded in the 1210s by St Dominic saw it as part of their mission to refute heresy and wrong thinking, hence the nickname "Domini Canes" – the hounds (ie hunting dogs) of God. He was able to enter in 1244 and spent the rest of his life studying,

writing and lecturing in Paris and Italy. He began his most important work, the *Summa Theologica* around 1266, an immense compendium of current thought, but famously left it unfinished at his death after receiving a revelation of God which, he said, made all that he had written seem like straw. His output was prodigious – he was able to dictate to four scribes simultaneously – and included teaching for lay Christians as well as complex treatises for the learned – texts with which scholars continue to grapple.

There are no contemporary portraits of Thomas – he lived before the era of portraits of individuals – but within 100 years a recognizable iconography for the saint had developed, always showing him in the Dominican black and white habit. Of course, he always holds a book, often symbolically radiating light.



Left: Jacopo Landini, St. Thomas Aquinas c 1375

One of the most memorable images was painted by Carlo Crivelli who represented him as one of nine saints in the side panels of the Demidoff Altarpiece (1476), now in the National Gallery in London, holding an open book, and a church sprouting weeds, with the implication that he is “weeding out” error. We know from contemporary descriptions that St Thomas was a large man, nicknamed “the Eloquent Ox” probably both for his size and his persistence., and Crivelli’s panel seems to reflect this.



A predella panel by Sassetta show St Thomas kneeling in prayer and inspired by the Holy Spirit. Along with his formidable intelligence and gift for reasoning Thomas was a mystic and poet, who wrote a number of hymns still in use.



His *Pange lingua* (Sing, my tongue), translated by Edward Caswall is 501 in TIS.  
It was written for Corpus Christi in 1264

Sing, my tongue, the Saviour's glory,  
Of His Flesh, the mystery sing;  
Of the Blood, all price exceeding,  
Shed by our Immortal King,  
Destined, for the world's redemption,  
From a noble Womb to spring.

Of a pure and spotless Virgin  
Born for us on earth below,  
He, as Man, with man conversing,  
Stayed, the seeds of truth to sow;  
Then He closed in solemn order  
Wondrously His Life of woe.

On the night of that Last Supper,  
Seated with His chosen band,  
He, the Paschal Victim eating,  
First fulfils the Law's command;  
Then as Food to all his brethren  
Gives Himself with His own Hand.

Word-made-Flesh, the bread of nature  
By His Word to Flesh He turns;  
Wine into His Blood He changes:  
What though sense no change discerns.  
Only be the heart in earnest,  
Faith her lesson quickly learns.

Down in adoration falling,  
Lo, the sacred Host we hail,  
Lo, o'er ancient forms departing  
Newer rites of grace prevail:  
Faith for all defects supplying,  
When the feeble senses fail.

To the Everlasting Father  
And the Son who comes on high  
With the Holy Ghost proceeding  
Forth from each eternally,  
Be salvation, honor, blessing,  
Might and endless majesty.  
Amen. Alleluia.