

St Matthias 24th February and George Herbert 27th February

Matthias may be celebrated on 14th May (as in 2020) or on 24th February (2021)

After the Resurrection, but before Pentecost, the eleven key disciples needed to replace Judas Iscariot from about 120 followers of Jesus.

Acts 1

(Peter said) 21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection." 23 So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. 24 Then they prayed and said, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen 25 to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." 26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

The Old Testament provides many examples of "casting lots" -drawing out a marked stick or stone to determine an outcome when there is uncertainty. However this procedure is never mentioned after the coming of the Holy spirit at Pentecost, which took place after Matthias' selection as Judas' replacement in the Twelve.

He is represented by artists as one of the twelve in a series, as in the examples by Simone Martini, (left) a painter from Siena in around 1317-19, and much later (1612) by Rubens in his Apostles series, like SS Philip and James. Like them, Matthias carries the implement of his martyrdom – an axe, since traditionally he was beheaded.



A legend grew up that his body had been discovered by St Helena in Jerusalem and taken back to Italy, where it was placed, along with the bodies of other martyrs, in a church dedicated to St Justina (Guistina) in Padua. A large chapel in the church, which has been rebuilt several times, is dedicated to St Matthias, with an elaborate 16th century altar containing the relics.



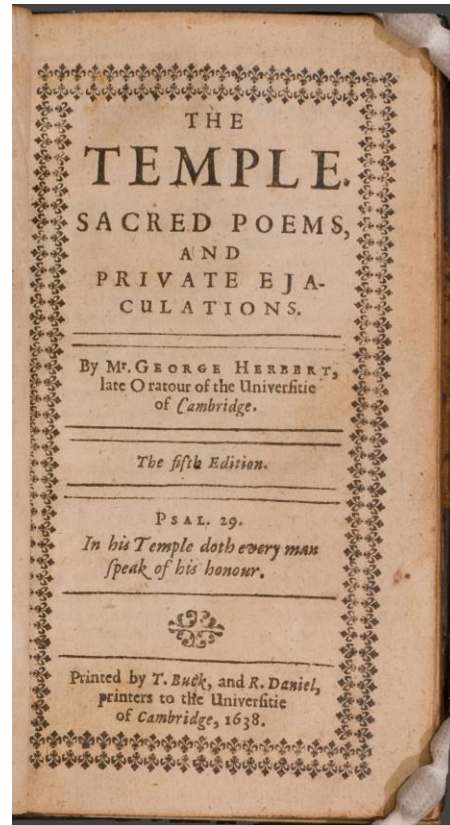
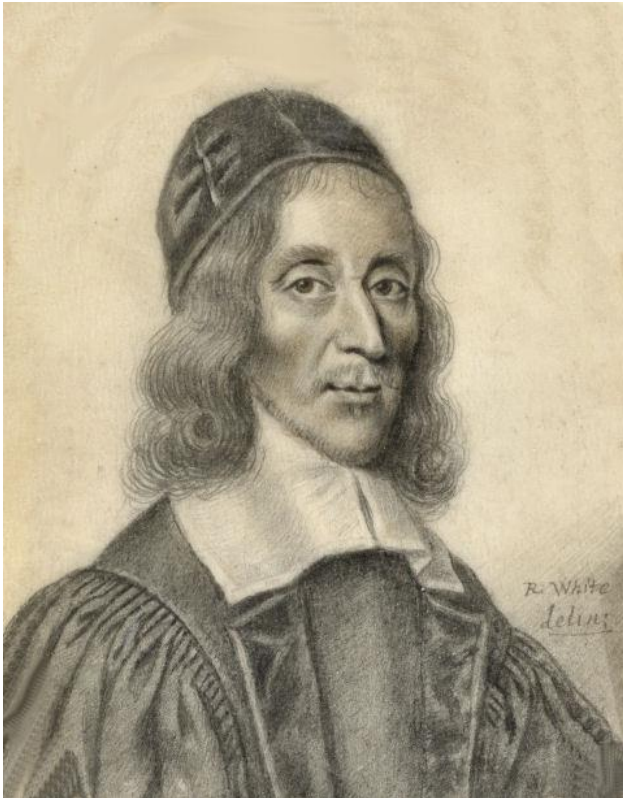
In 1635 the brilliant French printmaker Jacques Callot produced a series showing the martyrdom of all twelve apostles. These violent images include one of St Matthias being stabbed while before an altar, which for us might recall the death of Archbishop Romero, murdered as he stood before the altar after preaching in a small hospital church in 1980. Callot's series was done just after he had finished his deeply shocking series "The Great Miseries and Misfortunes of War" which has been described as "the first anti-war statement in European art." It was based on his experience of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) which ravaged Europe, originating in conflict between Protestants and Catholics, but erupting into a war between state powers.

In all Callot's Apostles series Christ appears in radiant light in the upper part of the print, as in the account of the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts, praying as he dies "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge". (Acts 7:56-60).



George Herbert (1593- 1633) 27th February

Herbert was born into a prominent Welsh family, and at 16 went to Trinity College, Cambridge, with the aim of studying for the priesthood. However, his brilliance with words saw him appointed as the University's Orator and he was drawn into court life and entered Parliament. In his mid 30s however his conflict over serving God was resolved by his entering the priesthood and spending the rest of his life in a small living in Lower Bemerton, near Salisbury. His set of poems – "The Temple" was only published after his death of TB at 39.



Robert White – George Herbert (1674)

Cover of First Edition of The Temple (1638)

Although the existing near contemporary portrait of Herbert (above wearing the typical garb of a clergyman of his time) makes him appear as a rather stern, austere figure, his writings reveal a different character. Along with concern for the wellbeing of his parishioners, both spiritual and material, shown in his handbook "A Priest to the Temple", and his collection of sayings and proverbs in different languages, his poems are suffused with humour, passion and above all love – the title of the final poem in the book. Dismissed by some earlier critics as "simple" the poems are now appreciated for their subtlety as well as honesty.

Herbert was a musician, and a friend of Izaak Walton, author of *The Compleat Angler*. This explains the details in William Dyce's romanticized 1860 painting of Herbert (below) with the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, to which Herbert walked weekly to join in choral service, in the background.



Several of the poems are in graphic visual form, like *Easter Wings*

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
 Though foolishly he lost the fame,
 Decaying more and more,
 Till he became
 Most poore:
 With thee
 O let me rise
 As larks, harmoniously,
 And sing this day thy victories:
 Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

 My tender age in sorrow did beginne
 And fill with sicknesses and shame
 Thou didst for punish finne,
 That I became
 Most thinne.
 With thee
 Let me combine,
 And feel this day thy victorie:
 For, if I imp my wing on thine,
 Affliction shall advance the flight in mee.

Three of his poems are regularly sung as hymns – “Teach me my God and King” (“The Elixir”); “King of Glory, King of peace” (TIS 201) and his setting of the 23rd Psalm “The King of Love my Shepherd is” (TIS 145)