

Sermon and Readings 21st June 2026 St Alban's Day 2026

Psalm 34.1-8

1 I will bless the Lord continually:
his praise shall be always in my mouth.
2 Let my soul boast of the Lord:
the humble shall hear it and rejoice.
3 O praise the Lord with me:
let us exalt his name together.
4 For I sought the Lord's help and he answered:
and he freed me from all my fears.
5 Look towards him and be bright with joy:
your faces shall not be ashamed.
6 Here is a wretch who cried, and the Lord heard me:
and saved me from all my troubles.
7 The angel of the Lord encamps round those who fear him:
and delivers them in their need.
8 O taste and see that the Lord is good:
happy are they that hide in him!

1 John 3.13-16

¹³ Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. ¹⁶ We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

Matthew 10.34-42

³⁴ Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶ and one's foes will be members of one's own household. ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who find their life will lose

it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ⁴⁰‘Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.’

Sermon

St. Alban is a captivating figure in British history, renowned as the first recorded martyr of the region. His extraordinary life, marked by an unwavering commitment to his faith, is filled with intriguing details that resonate with readers.

St. Alban was born in the third century in Verulamium, a Roman city known today as St Albans. It is situated in England, about 25 miles North of London.

Growing up in a pagan family, Alban's life was transformed when he encountered a Christian priest fleeing persecution. Inspired by the priest's teachings, Alban embraced Christianity, making a conscious decision to follow a new path.

Alban's commitment to his newfound faith was evident when he offered his home as a refuge for the Christian priest he encountered.

During intense persecution, this act of selflessness and bravery was a testament to his unwavering dedication to his beliefs. Little did he know that this act would have profound consequences for his life.

In a daring attempt to aid the priest's escape, Alban devised a remarkable plan. When soldiers discovered their hiding place, Alban donned the priest's garments, disguising himself as the fugitive.

This self-sacrifice allowed the priest to evade capture, but it sealed Alban's fate, as he would be held accountable for his courageous deception.

After discovering his ruse, Alban was arrested and brought before the Roman authorities.

He fearlessly and resolutely affirmed his Christian beliefs at his trial, refusing to renounce his faith despite the impending consequences. His unwavering stance challenged the prevailing religious norms of the time.

Unyielding in his faith, St. Alban faced a cruel fate. Sentenced to death by beheading, a common form of execution during that era, Alban embraced his impending martyrdom with courage and conviction. His steadfast dedication to his beliefs left an enduring mark on the history of Christianity in Britain.

The tale of St. Alban takes an unexpected turn when the executioner, assigned to carry out Alban's sentence, was profoundly moved by the saint's holiness and unwavering resolve.

Struck by the zeal of Alban's faith, the executioner converted to Christianity on the spot, leaving an enduring impact on those present at the scene.

Over the centuries, the legacy of St. Alban has been further solidified by the emergence of various miracles and legends associated with him.

These tales include accounts of healing springs and rivers miraculously appearing at the site of his execution, symbolizing the enduring spiritual power believed to emanate from the saint.

Established in the eighth century, the Abbey of St. Albans became a prominent centre of Christian worship and adoration in England.

This majestic abbey, standing as a testament to St. Alban's enduring reverence, attracted pilgrims and devotees from near and far. It remains an important historical and religious site to this day.

Each year, on June 22nd, St. Alban's Feast Day is celebrated as a commemoration of his martyrdom. This occasion allows Christians and history enthusiasts alike to honour his sacrifice, reflect upon his unwavering devotion, and recognize the lasting impact of the first recorded British martyr.

But being serious for a moment, St. Alban's extraordinary life, filled with selflessness, courage, and unwavering faith, makes him an inspiring figure in British history. His story resonates with readers of all backgrounds, from his conversion and sheltering of a Christian priest to his ultimate sacrifice.

As we celebrate St. Alban's Feast Day, we pay tribute to his remarkable journey, ensuring that his legacy continues to inspire generations to come.

There are other supposedly miraculous things that happened during Alban's execution, but when we strip them away here is what we have: a story of hospitality and sacrifice. Alban got in trouble when he offered shelter to a Christian priest who was being hunted. And he stayed in trouble when he continued to profess belief in the Christian God and not in the Roman Emperor. Hospitality and sacrifice. How do these virtues of the third century speak to us in the twenty-first?

Listen again to these words of Jesus from today's gospel [Matthew 10: 34-42]:
Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

The story of Alban is important for all of us because it reminds us of what a Christian person is supposed to be and do. I think in twenty-first century Australia we have become confused about that. In the Aussie public imagination, Christians are seen as people who tell others how they should live. Within the church itself, we seem to be a group that wants to argue about what we think Christianity is supposed to mean.

At its best, however, Christianity has never been about telling other people how to live or what to think. Indeed, at its best Christianity has never been much about "meaning" at all. The gospel is not about thought. It is about action. In a pragmatic tradition like ours (Anglicanism), following Jesus has always been less about theology and more about behaviour. We imitate Jesus not by trying to think like him. We imitate Jesus in trying to act like him. It's the same with those exemplary Christians, the saints. We trivialize saints by downplaying their witness and emphasizing the cute things associated with them.

In our gospel today, Jesus does not tell his companions what to think or what to tell others to think. Instead, he tells his companions what to do; and there are only two things. He tells them to welcome others as they would welcome him. He tells them that if they want to save their lives they must lose them. He talks about hospitality. He talks about sacrifice.

Hospitality and sacrifice: plain and simple yet hard to pull off. No doubt it is easier to argue about the creed, the Trinity, the virgin birth, the resurrection than it is to practice hospitality and exemplify sacrifice. But these two practices are what Jesus

commands. Give a cup of cold water to these little ones. Those who lose their life for my sake will find it. Plain, simple, yet hard to do.

It is easier to name a mountain after a saint than it is to pattern your life by him. Because their examples are so challenging, we will always treat saints as mascots rather than examples. But the fact that we give one day a year to celebrate Saint Alban says something about the nature of this faith community; it says that we remain committed to patterning ourselves as a people after the example of his witness. And just as Jesus advises us in the gospel, so did St. Alban live his life in the service of these two virtues. Give a cup of cold water to these little ones: hospitality. Those who lose their life for my sake will find it: sacrifice. These are fitting virtues for an city faith community, especially today.

First there is hospitality. Alban sheltered a person who was being unjustly pursued by the state. In third century, Roman Britain, Christian clergy were the hunted. In twenty-first century, Australia there are a host of people in jeopardy, but in our place and moment it is undocumented immigrants and the refugees who need our sheltering care. “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me.” Here at Toowoomba West we have begun the work of collaborating with others to offer hospitality to those in need through our Winter Shelter work. In so doing you are following the example of Alban, one of our patron saints. It is a witness to a world of what Christianity is actually about.

And then there is sacrifice. Somewhere along the line we Aussies turned Christianity into a philosophy of happiness and success. There’s nothing wrong, of course, with being happy or successful. It’s when we turn happiness and success into Christian virtues that we get into trouble. Happiness and success are fine, but they are at best accidents, and they are not the point of the Christian life. The point of the Christian life is in losing oneself on behalf of others, and in so doing finding not only oneself but finally getting what it’s all about. We talk about sacrifice as if it’s the bitter pill we must swallow as part of all this Jesus business. In doing so we miss the joy of what the Jesus movement is all about. In spite of what you might see on TV or hear from our national leaders, generosity and compassion are not only virtues—they are pleasures. A lifetime of being kind actually turns you into somebody you might want to be.

St. Alban knew all that. He offered hospitality to one in danger and finally gave his life as a witness to the generous and embracing love he found in donning the priest’s cloak. You and I will probably not be called to martyrdom, but we are

called, as was Alban, to lives of hospitality and sacrifice. As followers of Jesus and companions of Alban, our job is neither to make it to the top nor to tell others how to live. As followers of Jesus and companions of Alban, our job is to welcome others and lose ourselves in their service. It's a simple calling, and a noble one. As we gather now around God's table, to that calling we once again commit ourselves, and for that calling we continue as always to give thanks. Amen.