

SAINT BARTHOLOMEW

Feast Day 24th August

St. Bartholomew by El Greco



Bartholomew was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. There is very little known for sure about him apart from a few references in the Gospels where there is confusion between him and Nathaniel. There are some legends which exist about him. One is that he went to India and left there a copy of the Gospel of St. Matthew. Another is that he founded the first church in Armenia.

His festival day is 24th August- a particularly inauspicious day for a patronal festival as it is set right in the heart of the holiday season. In the English tradition, the day was often used for a big fair and hence the name **Bartholomew's Fair**.

When the work began compiling a new hymn book called *Songs of Praise* (published 1931) the editor Percy Dearmer asked the writer and journalist Joyce Anstruther (also known as Jan Struther) to write a hymn about Bartholomew to redress the balance and bring him a

little more attention. She must have quickly realised the enormity of her task! She started the hymn with the following lines:

O Saint of summer, what can we sing for you?
How can we praise you, what can we bring for you?
Lost are your words, your deeds are nameless,
Saint without history, mute and fameless.

Said you wise sayings? No one has hoarded them.
Worked you great wonders? None has recorded them.
Only your name, time's hand defying,
Shines with the light of your faith undying."

Despite this lack of identity, many churches have been named after Bartholomew and other institutions, famously, in London, Bart's Hospital.

In works of art he is often represented with a large knife, or, as in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, (right) with his own skin hanging over his arm. This is because tradition holds that in Armenia he was flayed alive and then crucified with his head upside down. This fate has led to him being adopted as the patron saint of tanners.



NEIL RICHARDSON