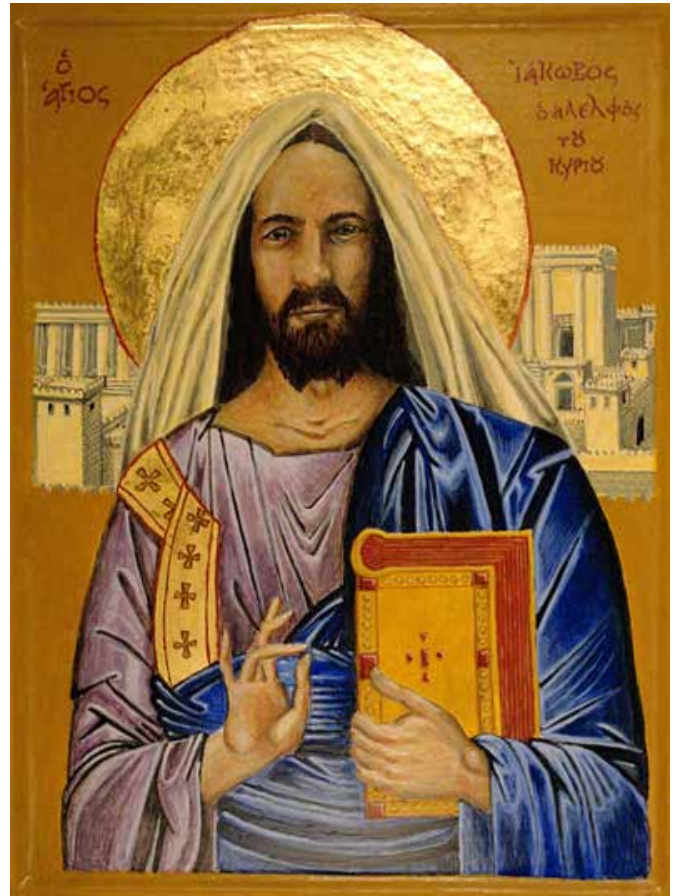


Weekly Musing † October 24, 2011

Modern icon of St. James of Jerusalem by Tobias Haller

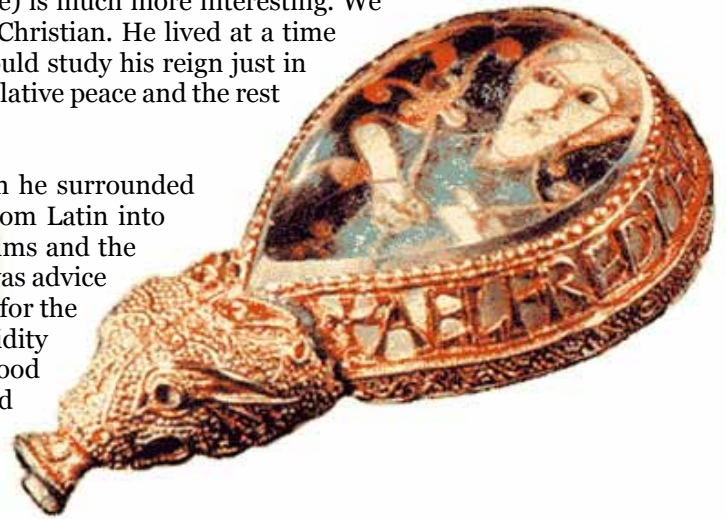
There are two “Red letter” feast days this week, St. James, Brother of Our Lord and also St. Simon and St. Jude, Apostles. The trouble with the original apostles is that for the most part there is a handful of sentences (maybe less) in the New Testament about them and a ton of what may politely be called “pious legend.” St. James of Jerusalem was a major player in the early life of our Lord. We call him the Lord’s brother, our Roman Catholic friends call him a cousin wishing as they do to preserve the virginity of Mary even after the birth of Jesus. In addition to being highly unlikely, that comes out of a notion that sex and marriage are second best to celibacy. A long time ago, one of the canons at the cathedral where I worked referred to those of us who were single as “having chosen the holier estate.” He said it with a smile. Incidentally he later became suffragan and then ordinary of the diocese.



Silver coin of Alfred the Great

Alfred the Great (notice there is no “St.” in front of his name) is much more interesting. We know much of him and he is a worthy man and celebrated Christian. He lived at a time when England was still not quite unified (849 – 99). You could study his reign just in terms of the battles he fought. There was one time frame of relative peace and the rest was constant battle, mostly with the cursed Vikings.

The fascinating thing about Alfred is his learning. Although he surrounded himself with scholars, he himself translated many works from Latin into the English of the time. This work included the first 50 Psalms and the work of Pope Gregory the Great on pastoral care. The latter was advice for bishops. My favorite title for one of the chapters is: “That for the most part the occupation of government dissipates the solidity of the mind.” It is not so much a book of subtle wisdom as good sound advice given as admonition by one of the most respected persons of the church. Now days we might find ourselves deluged with advice of varying degrees of worthiness but not so in this time and place. Usually it is priests, bishops, or lay brothers of some sort who do this translating work. Alfred did it himself. He also was a great reformer of government and founder of monasteries. Remember that monasteries were the great engines of Christianity that preserved and spread the teaching of the church as well as the teaching of the Greeks and others as well.



One of the best known of all English artifacts is the so-called Alfred Jewel. The jewel itself is only common quartz but the work on this small piece (2½ inch) is wonderful. It is often thought that it was part of a pointer given to bishops to read with. We take reading and books for granted but such a costly piece as this reminds us it was not always so. Even the act of reading was worthy of this fine instrument.

News from St. Luke's

We have started the Pledge Drive process for St. Luke's. The first part is putting together a budget. There are two forms of the budget. One is the older type you are used to, and the other part is something we call the "Narrative Budget." This is the budget defined by our mission. I came across the notion today of a church budget defined as "a place for dreams to stand." I rather like that.

The economic downturn we have has not been kind to our trust funds nor to anyone else's. Although we do not take money from fewer of our trust funds (having determined it inappropriate to take from some of the funds which were not left for that purpose) those funds are dwindling. That will mean some hard choices. It is also an opportunity for people to raise their pledges. My own life shows me I spend money on what is important. For better or worse I tend to value those things most I spend the most money on.

Thanks to Libby Laird for leading a very full class for those interested in lay reading. We are grateful to have lots of volunteers at St. Luke's.

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