

# CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL

Date:	14 June 2026
Service:	Eucharist, Richard of Chichester
Preacher:	The Dean, The Very Revd Dr Edward Dowler

We celebrate St Richard with joy today in the midst of his city and cathedral church. As we do so, I would like to offer some reflections on his great prayer which I myself first came across when I was a teenager, and which is a familiar friend to many of us:

Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits thou hast given me,  
for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me.  
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,  
may I know thee more clearly,  
love thee more dearly,  
and follow thee more nearly, day by day.  
Amen.

Richard reputedly composed the prayer in 1253, when he was very near to death. Thereafter, he was buried according to his wishes in the chapel in this cathedral dedicated to his two heroes: St Thomas (a Becket) of Canterbury and St Edmund Rich. But because so many pilgrims flocked to pray at his burial place, his body was later relocated to the more spacious shrine at the east end of the Cathedral.

Normally Christian prayers are addressed to the Father through the Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit but this prayer is unusual because it is addressed directly to Christ: 'Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ'. Perhaps as we are close to death, we may start to

feel a greater closeness to Christ. I remember in 2022 reading an account of Pope Benedict's death, which said that his final words were simply, 'Jesus, ich lieb dich': Jesus I love you. In any case, this address to Christ in St Richard's prayer is represented in our icon of him in which, unusually, Christ is shown in the upper corner of the icon, with Richard looking directly towards him.

The prayer falls into three parts. First, he thanks Jesus for for all the benefits thou has bought for me; for all the pains and insults thou has borne for me. This takes us to Christ's suffering on the cross, and to what this has done for us. Theologians around the time of Richard often reflected on two related effects of Jesus' crucifixion. First, it was like a ransom paid for us, which brought us benefits: union with God; eternal life; the defeat of the grip that sin and death have over us. Secondly, Christ, by dying on the cross, shared in, and ultimately transformed the darkest places of human experience; he took onto himself the pains and insults that would otherwise have been ours.

If, in the first part of the prayer Richard thanks Jesus for what he has done, in the second part, he addresses him by a series of titles: most merciful redeemer, teacher, friend and brother.

The first of these: merciful redeemer refers to what the prayer has already said about Christ taking our suffering and bringing us benefits. But we move on from that perhaps slightly legal language to terms that express Christ's closeness of relationship with us. As we encounter him in the gospels, Jesus is the true teacher, instructing his disciples about subjects such as the overwhelming importance of loving God and our neighbour; about the closeness of the Kingdom of God; the need to be forgiven and to forgive. Mary Magdalen addresses the risen Jesus in the garden as Rabbouni, the Aramaic word that, chiming in with Richard's prayer, means 'teacher'.

Next, St Richard addresses Jesus as a friend. For the Greek philosopher Aristotle, friendship was an all-important component in living the happy life: 'no one would choose to live without friends', he wrote. St Richard would surely have approved of the nineteenth century hymn, What a friend we have in Jesus all our sin and grief to bear whose author articulates daily companionship with Christ in both joy and sorrow.

And finally, if Jesus is a merciful redeemer, teacher and friend, he is also our brother: God with us. The one who, as the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament puts it, is able to be a merciful and faithful high priest, because has been made like his brothers and sisters in every respect; who identifies with us; shares our pains, struggles and challenges.

From looking at what Christ has done, through looking at the different ways in which we might address him, we come to the final and best-known part of the prayer in which Richard asks Christ for three specific things.

First, to know Christ more clearly: to have a more distinct and accurate vision of him. St Paul expresses to the Philippians (3.10) the hope 'that I may know Christ and the power of his resurrection and fellowship of his suffering'. Not just know things about Jesus, but actually to know him; to have a direct friendship with him in which, as with human friendships, the more you get to know somebody, the more you find there is to know.

His second request is to love Christ more dearly; to be so caught up in Christ's love for us, that we may be able to reciprocate that love just a little bit.

And finally he asks to follow Christ more nearly. In the parish where I first served as a Curate, there was a very devout lady called Edna who always wanted to hear about what she called my walk with the Lord. By contrast with what clergy sometimes think people are

interested in, she did not particularly want to hear, for example, my thoughts about current issues in the world, nor even about what I was reading or studying. But what she did want to know about was my walk with the Lord: whether I was truly following Jesus more nearly, keeping daily and hourly companionship with him. As Anglicans we can instinctively shy away from that sort of language, but Edna did not and nor indeed did St Richard.

Even at this point close to death, he wants to have daily a walk with the Lord Jesus, as his disciples followed him through the towns and villages of Galilee, and as after the resurrection they walked to Emmaus. May we today, like our beloved St Richard, put our hand into Christ's hand. May seek to know, love and follow Jesus, trusting him to lead us into the future.