

Prayer of the Month • January 2013

Although I am dust and ashes, Lord, I am tied to you by bonds of love. Therefore I feel I can speak freely to you. Before I came to know you, I was nothing. I did not know the meaning of life, and I had no understanding of myself. I have no doubt that you had a purpose in causing me to be born; yet you had no need of me, and on my own I was of no use to you. But then you decided that I should hear the words of your Son, Jesus Christ. And that as I heard his words, you enabled his love to penetrate my heart. Now I am completely saturated in his love and faith, and there is no remedy. Now, Lord, I cannot change my attitude to my faith; I can only die for it.

Hilary of Poitiers, c.310-68

Hilary is best known as a theologian, but here we see him in a very intimate conversation with the Lord. It is a very personal prayer, showing profound dependence on God, thankfulness and commitment. Hilary recognises that he has nothing to offer God ('dust and ashes', 'I was nothing'), and yet, despite his nothingness, he is confident that God had a purpose for him. Everything depends on God. Only God opened his ears and penetrated his heart, through love. This absorption of love has set him on an unalterable course – to live and die for the Lord.

Hilary showed great commitment to the Church and to orthodoxy throughout his life, and was exiled by the Emperor Constantius, whom he later denounced as the Antichrist; he continued to govern his diocese from exile in Phrygia (for nearly four years). Hilary was born into a pagan family but converted to Christianity and became a bishop around 350. He got involved in the Arian disputes (about the nature of Christ), defending orthodoxy, and became the leading Latin theologian of his age. St Augustine of Hippo called him 'the illustrious doctor of the churches'. He died around 368. He was formally recognised as *Universae Ecclesiae Doctor* in 1851 by Pope Pius IX. His best-known work is 'De Trinitate' (against the Arians) in twelve books, and he also wrote on doctrinal history, as well as biblical commentaries. He is credited as the earliest known writer of hymns in the Western Church, although none of the hymns ascribed to him is indisputably his. The name Hilary term is given in Oxford University to the term, beginning on 7 January, that includes his feast, which is on 13 January.



Colin Lunt