

Saint Germanus of Auxerre (378 - 448AD) and the Alleluia Victory

In a book I'm currently reading about Celtic Britain there is mention of Saint Germanus of Auxerre and his influence on the Celtic church in the fifth century, especially in Wales and the Alleluia victory, a bloodless victory of the Britons over Saxon invaders. Even though the historical accuracy is contested by many scholars I found the story quite uplifting against the present day horrors of the war in Ukraine.

Putting it into context, the Roman army and imperial administration were withdrawn from Britain in 410AD leaving the church and other institutions to fend for themselves. It marked the start of the so called Dark Ages, a poorly documented era especially back in the fifth century.

In 429AD the bishops in England appealed to the pope for help fighting Pelagianism, a heresy spreading through Britain and causing a good deal of trouble. In response, Pope Celestine 1 sent Germanus, the Bishop of Auxerre, to Britain, assisted by Bishop Lupus of Troyes. A book, *The Life of St Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre*, was written by Constantius of Lyons in about 480 AD and it provides rare details of life in Britain immediately after the Roman withdrawal.

Constantius wrote describing numerous miracles performed by Germanus after he was consecrated bishop before describing his visit to Britain in 429AD. The Bishops were well received with "their preaching and their miracles". Their fame increased when Catholic views won the day over the Pelagians, cemented by a sight restoring miracle by Germanus. The bishops then visited the shrine of St Alban who is said to have appeared to Germanus in a dream before going to the assistance of the Britons who had been forced to retreat against a coalition of Saxon invaders and Picts, probably somewhere near Mold in North East Wales.

The bishops arrived in the camp and Germanus announced he would be their leader in battle but first of all a rustic church was built and many Britons were prepared for an Easter baptism.

Constantius wrote "A church was built of leafy branches in readiness for Easter Day, on the plan of a city church, though set in a camp on active service. The soldiers paraded still wet from baptism, faith was fervid, the aid of weapons was thought little of, and all looked to help from heaven. Meanwhile the enemy had learned of the practices and appearance of the camp. They promised themselves an easy victory over practically disarmed troops and pressed on in haste"

The pagans were spotted however and Germanus led the Britons into a valley with mountains on either side. The bishops then cried out Alleluia three times, a cry which was repeated loudly by all the Britons, many of whom were spread out and hidden in the mountains. Constantius then wrote

"The enemy were panic stricken, thinking that the surrounding rocks and the very sky itself were falling on them... they fled in every direction, throwing away their weapons and thankful if they could save at least their skins. Many threw themselves into the river which they had just crossed at their ease and were drowned in it"

"Thus the British army looked on at its revenge without striking a blow, idle spectators of the victory achieved, The booty strewn everywhere was collected; the pious soldiery obtained the spoils of a victory from heaven. The bishops were elated at the rout of the enemy without bloodshed and a victory gained by faith and not by force"

“ Thus this most wealthy island, with the defeat both of it’s spiritual and of it’s human foes , was rendered secure in every sense “The two bishops then returned home – and there followed accounts of a second visit but there are doubts over that.

The Alleluia battle is also recorded in Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People in 731AD .

Nick Mayhew – Smith in his book on Celtic Britain has concluded that in his view there was no battle at all in the valley but that a negotiated settlement was reached by Germanus in a sacred meeting place , a place surrounded by trees where the use of weapons was historically banned. He also thinks this is the earliest known description of the construction of a church in Britain more of a sacred enclave in the woods where weapons were absent than a church building as such., a sort of “ field church ”rather similar to the later early seventh century meeting place of Augustine , Britons and Saxons by St Augustine’s Oak .

There is an Alleluia Obelisk actually in existence – put up in 1736 by a landowner on the outskirts of Mold to mark the bloodless victory.

The word alleluia also spelled as Hallelujah is translated usually as “Praise the Lord” and is found right through the Old Testament especially in the Psalms. Apparently the Hebrew originally comes from two words , later merged into one. The first part is from Hillel meaning to praise and then jah- a shortened form of the four letter Hebrew name for the Lord YHWH , pronounced as Yahweh.

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Let us keep faith and trust in the Lord and shout our alleluias while praying for peace in the Ukraine and for God’s help for oppressed peoples everywhere.

Let us pray for heavenly intervention and for God’s Grace in alleviating all their pain and suffering.

Alleluia, alleluia and a thousand more

Amen