**History of St. Leonard**

St Leonard (AD 485 – 560) is believed to have been a Frankish nobleman, raised in the court of Clovis, King of the Salian Franks, and baptised with 3,000 of Clovis’ subjects in 498 by St Remigus, Archbishop of Rheims. But the only evidence for this tradition – which claims that St Leonard immediately decided to follow a religious calling, can be found in the earliest work of his ‘Life’ dating from the eleventh century.

In 507, after the battle of Vougle, he was given permission by Clovis to release any prisoner he visited, including prisoners of war. The King was deeply impressed by St. Leonard’s judge of character, humility and sense of Godliness. He was also offered an archbishopric, which he refused, believing that acceptance would be contrary to Christ’s plan for him. Soon after he joined a monastic group at Micy (Orléans).

Later, while Clovis was hunting nearby, Clothilde, his wife, went into labour; St Leonard prayed with him through the night and, following safe delivery (possibly of their daughter, also Clothilde), Clovis offered him as much land as he could ride around in one day on a donkey. St Leonard used the land to establish a monastery at Noblat near Limoges, where he became Abbott. In old age he retreated to the surrounding forest and lived as a hermit.

St Leonard is the Patron Saint of prisoners, pregnant women, country dwellers and horses, and is usually depicted with prison chains.

In England St Leonard’s fame spread quickly and many churches from the time of William I were dedicated to him. There are 162 churches dedicated to St Leonard in England today. Some 20 English monasteries and 30 hospitals were known to have been dedicated to St Leonard.