

## Tony Thinking Aloud lxxxv

Monday December 6<sup>th</sup> was Saint Nicholas Day. If you live in Holland and many other continental countries the gifts we associate with Christmas are given on this day.

So, who was Saint Nicholas and how did he come associated with Santa Claus? He was an early Christian Bishop in the city of Myra in Turkey who is believed to have lived from 270-343.

I remember being told a story about three sisters without dowries as their father was not well off, so they were unable to get married. An unknown benefactor who proved to be Saint Nicholas threw three bags of gold through the window into their home, they fell into three stockings drying over the fire. Basically, the Bishop is seen as being concerned about those in need, they now had their dowries and were married.

So, we have the concept of gifts to those less fortunate. Note, the gifts went into stockings and some into clogs. This custom has carried on for centuries.

At the Reformation when celebration of Saints Days were much reduced, the giving of presents moved to Christmas Day.

Quite a lot of jollification is now involved, why? We move to the USA and in particular New York City (originally New Amsterdam, the home of many Dutch people). In the early 1800's, Christmas time became a particular time for celebration and giving of gifts. This when the Saint Nicholas tradition, brought by the Dutch to America, effectively became about Santa Claus perhaps from Sinter Klaas a shortened version of Sint Nikolaas. The red coat comes from the bishop's Cope and the white, the Alb worn underneath. To that we can add other traditions we know, including Father Christmas coming down the chimney. You may like to look up other traditions and find their background.

The central aspect of it all is celebration and gifts. As I wrote last week, the gifts help us to focus on Jesus, the gift of God. The focus on our gifts today should reflect giving to those in need, a reflection on Saint Nicholas and his gift to the three sisters.