

Reflection Saturday 7th Week Easter St Augustine of Canterbury 2023

Saint Augustine of Canterbury: Christianity in Britain started early, but was largely submerged by the pagan Anglo-Saxon invasions of the 5th and 6th centuries. It stayed alive only in the far west, which remained British because it was too remote and inaccessible for the invaders to attack. It is said that Pope Gregory the Great saw some fair-haired Anglo-Saxon slaves for sale in a market in Rome. He asked where they were from, and when he was told, replied *non Angli, sed angeli* – “not Angles, but angels,” and determined to secure their evangelization. So, Gregory organised a party of 30 monks to travel to south-eastern England and spread the Gospel there, and chose as their leader Augustine, prior of the monastery of St Andrew in Rome. They landed in 597, and were welcomed by the king of Kent, Ethelbert, who became a Christian along with many of his subjects. A second wave of missionaries arrived in 601. Augustine went to Arles, in France, where he was consecrated archbishop of the English, and then returned to Canterbury to set up his see. The mission prospered, and he founded two more sees, at London and at Rochester in Kent.

The evangelization of the country was planned in close agreement with Pope Gregory, respecting local traditions. Pagan temples and holy places were converted to Christian use; and pagan feasts were superseded by Christian ones. This is consistent with the pattern of evangelization throughout the first millennium, which saw Christianity as a fulfilment of what went before, rather than a contradiction of it. Even in Rome, temples of Juno became churches dedicated to Our Lady.

In far west Britain, where British bishops had survived the pagan invasions, Augustine was less successful. The traditions of the Celtic church were different from the Roman ones, and bishops who had guided their people for generations would not submit to missionaries from overseas. It took several generations for the whole of Great Britain to become Christian and for the English and British liturgical traditions to be reconciled. Augustine died at Canterbury on 26th May 604 or 605.

Did you hear about the guy who invented the knock-knock joke? He won the no-bell prize!!

What do you call a fly with no wings? A walk.