

ST. AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY

Yesterday was the Feast of St. Augustine of Canterbury, who was the very first Archbishop of Canterbury. He was born in the early 500's A.D. and is considered to be the 'Apostle to the English' and founder of the English Church (he has a lot to answer for concerning hierarchy!!). He was a Benedictine monk and prior of a monastery when in 595 Pope Gregory the Great chose him to lead a mission to christianize Kent from Anglo-Saxon paganism. The story goes that Gregory had seen some fair-haired children in Rome and asked who they were. He was told they were Angles - "not Angles but Angels" was his alleged reply.

Augustine landed in England in 597 and proceeded to Canterbury. It must have seemed a daunting task to step out of his comfort zone. He actually turned back to Rome and asked Gregory if he could opt out (remind you of anyone?). But he went, helped by the fact that the King of Kent had married Bertha (daughter of the king of Paris) who was a Christian. The King converted, as did many of his subjects during a mass baptism on Christmas Day 597.

Augustine was made Archbishop of Canterbury but never managed to persuade the Celtic churches to accept the authority of Rome- that was not done till the Synod of Whitby. Augustine died in 604, buried in Canterbury, but his shrine was destroyed in the Reformation along with thousands of manuscripts.

Think about St Augustine who was led where he didn't want to go (see John 21:18) but went. There are times in our lives when we're asked to do something or called to go somewhere by God. Often, we resist because it is outside our comfort zone. Perhaps we can reflect on those such times in our lives. Here are some words of Thomas Merton in his book "The Seven Storey Mountain".

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead... I know.. you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost .. You will never leave me to face my perils alone"

If you ever go to Canterbury, you can see the ruins of a monastery which have been preserved by English Heritage. Ruth actually went to Christ Church College in Canterbury, next to St. Augustine's to study Theology and Education. St. Augustine's in those days was full of ordinands training for the priesthood. It has a beautiful chapel. One of the (many) reasons why she went was because her granny said that everyone should know about Jesus - it came as a shock to discover that there were many other world religions, but it reminds us that

often God calls us through other people. Perhaps you have memories of college, first workplace etc when it seemed almost overwhelming and you too like Augustine were out of your comfort zones.

Ruth had some inspiring teachers and her love of David Essex was born from Canterbury when a trip to a place called London was held to see "Godspell!"

Anyway, think of Augustine venturing into the unknown and of Thomas Merton who could not see the road ahead - but both trusted that God was with them. We pray that God will give us the strength to face an uncertain future.

Jeff