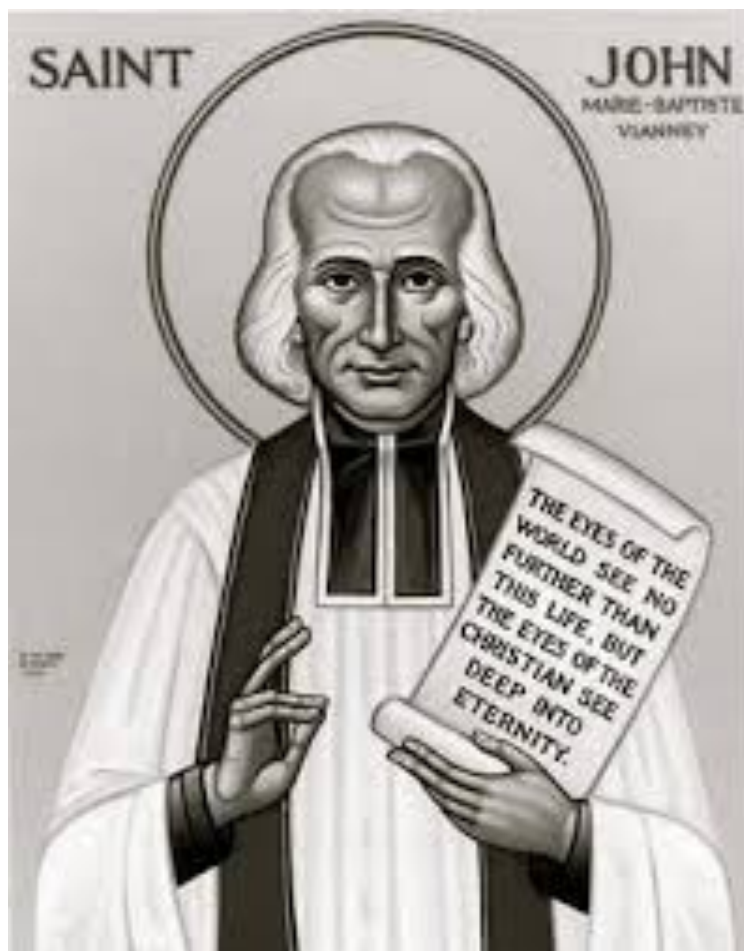


Saints of the Month

A selection of lives of the saints for August 2020



1st August – St Alphonsus Liguori

Alphonsus Maria de Liguori was born in 1696 near Naples, Italy, the son of a captain in the Navy and a devoted mother from a noble family in the city. His parents provided him with an exceptional education in philosophy, literature, and the arts. He was 16 when he was awarded doctorates of civil and canon law. When he was 18, like many nobles, he joined the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mercy with whom he cared for the sick at the hospital, washing afflicted bodies, feeding the helpless, changing bedclothes and devoting himself to works of mercy and compassion.

He followed his father's wishes and became a lawyer and before he was 20, he was regarded as one of the most gifted lawyers working in Naples. This work, however, despite its success, did not satisfy him at the deepest levels of his heart and soul. After losing what was the most important court case he had ever taken on, Alphonsus left the legal profession to enter the priesthood, much to the disappointment of his father. He was ordained in 1726.

He lived his first years as a priest with the homeless and marginalised youth of Naples, and he worked himself to the point of exhaustion. He was popular because of his plain and simple preaching style, which reached people who had been alienated from their faith. His sermons had three great images: Jesus an infant in the crib, Jesus crucified on the Cross, and Jesus vibrantly alive and filled with love for all in the Eucharist. To this he added the image of Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer, to whom he had a great devotion.

In 1732, Alphonsus set out to dedicate himself completely to the service of the poor and most abandoned. He sought others who were called as he was, and adopted a style of ministry to "mission among the people" — and so began the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, commonly known as the Redemptorists.

As well as his preaching and missionary work, Alphonsus was a prolific writer and his works are still very popular, especially his meditations on the Stations of the Cross and the Glories of Mary.

O God, who constantly raise up in your Church new examples of virtue,
grant that we may follow so closely in the footsteps
of Saint Alphonsus in his zeal for souls
as to attain the same rewards that are his in heaven.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

4th August- St Jean-Marie Vianney

Perhaps more commonly known as the Curé d'Ars, St Jean-Marie Vianney was a French priest who is the patron saint of parish priests.

He was born on 8th May 1786 and in childhood saw priests as being his heroes, and wanted to follow that way of life. However, his lack of formal schooling held him back. But undeterred he battled with his academic studies and was ordained in 1815. In 1818 he was to become the parish priest of a village named Ars. As he got closer to the village he met a boy tending sheep and asked him if the village was much further, the boy pointed to the village and accompanied him the rest of the way. When they arrived in front of the church, the priest said to him: "Thank you for showing me the way to Ars.... I will show you the way to heaven".

This was life post the French Revolution, and Jean-Marie Vianney found that his parishioners had become very indifferent to religion and had become very fond of material things. This was very different to his own life, which had a great zeal for the Church and lived a very austere life, his diet mainly consisting of potatoes. He was very strict with his people, and denounced their drinking and dancing on Sundays. His high standards were not always popular in his early days, but his fervent preaching and care and concern for the poor won people over. He worked tirelessly, to show people the love of Jesus and to encourage them to turn their lives around.

His great work was in the confessional. In winter he would spend 12 hours a day hearing confessions and up to 16 hours in summer. His fame as a confessor grew and people came from far and wide to seek his spiritual counsel.

He died on 4th August 1859, in his parish of Ars, which has since become a very important place of pilgrimage.

Almighty and merciful God,
who made the Priest Saint Jean-Marie Vianney
wonderful in his pastoral zeal,
grant, we pray,
that through his intercession and example
we may in charity win brothers and sisters for Christ
and attain with them eternal glory.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

6th August – The Feast of the Transfiguration

Today we celebrate the occasion, recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke's Gospel, on which Jesus, as he was beginning to teach his disciples that he must die and rise again, revealed himself in shining splendour to Peter, James, and John. Moses and Elijah were present, and are taken to signify that the Law and the Prophets testify that Jesus is the promised Messiah. God the Father also proclaimed him as such, saying, "This is my Beloved Son. Listen to him." For a moment the veil is drawn aside, and people still on earth are permitted a glimpse of the heavenly reality, the glory of God.

It is such an important occurrence in the life and ministry of Jesus that it is given its own feast day.

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Feast of the Transfiguration has been celebrated since the late fourth century, and is one of the twelve great festivals of the Eastern Orthodox calendar. In the West it was observed after the ninth century by some monastic orders, and in 1457 Pope Callistus III ordered its general observance.

The Gospel account of the Transfiguration is also read on a Sunday just before Lent starts, or on the second Sunday of Lent and this forms a fitting transition between the Epiphany season, in which Christ makes himself known, and the Lenten season, in which he prepares the disciples for what lies ahead.

Father in heaven,
whose Son Jesus Christ was wonderfully transfigured
before chosen witnesses upon the holy mountain,
and spoke of the exodus he would accomplish at Jerusalem:
give us strength so to hear his voice and bear our cross
that in the world to come we may see him as he is;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

8th August – St Dominic

Dominic was born in Spain in 1170. He was an exemplary student and spent 6 years studying theology and 4 years studying the arts.

In 1191, the area he lived in was hit by a famine and Dominic sold everything that he had to buy food for the poor.

In 1194, Dominic joined a Benedictine order, the Canons Regular in Osma. He became the superior, or prior of the chapter in 1201. Dominic was sent on preaching missions, and he won over many people by his preaching and his power of argument. He felt that preachers needed to demonstrate holiness of life, humility and asceticism. He felt that a new religious order was needed to address the needs of people living in the growing cities and would combine with preaching, study and education.

He sought the authority of the Pope to establish this new order, which he called the Ordo Praedicatorum (OP), in English, the Order of Preachers or the Dominicans as it became more popularly known. The Dominicans travelled around preaching the word of God, and Dominic made their headquarters in Rome.

Dominic had a strong devotion to Our Lady and praying the Rosary, and the spread of the Rosary has been attributed to Dominic's preaching. The Rosary remains at the heart of the Dominican order, and Dominicans wear large Rosaries on their belts as a constant aid to their prayers.

In July of 1221, Dominic took ill with a fever. He asked to be laid on the ground, still refusing a bed. He exhorted his brothers to keep a spirit of humility and charity. After several weeks of illness, he made a last confession and a will, then passed away on August 6. He died in the presence of his brother Dominicans. Dominic was just 51.

Almighty God,
whose servant Dominic grew in the knowledge of your truth
and formed an order of preachers to proclaim the faith of Christ:
by your grace give to all your people a love for your word
and a longing to share the gospel,
so that the whole world may come to know you
and your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen,

10th August – St Laurence

We know very little about Laurence's life, but his martyrdom made a deep and lasting impression on the Church.

Laurence was a Deacon, serving in Rome under Pope Sixtus II. As a Deacon, Laurence had responsibility for the material goods of the Church and the distribution of alms to the poor. Pope Sixtus was put to death by the authorities, and Laurence knew that he would be arrested. So, he sought out the poor, widows and orphans of Rome and gave them all the money he had to hand. When the authorities heard about this, they thought that the Church must have a great wealth. Laurence was arrested and was asked to bring the treasures to the authorities. Laurence replied that the Church was indeed rich, and that he would show the authorities a valuable part and asked for time in which to make an inventory.

After three days he gathered a great number of blind, lame, maimed, leprous, orphaned, and widowed persons and put them in rows. When the Prefect arrived, Laurence simply said, "These are the treasure of the Church."

The Prefect was so angry he told Laurence that he would indeed have his wish to die. He had a great gridiron prepared with coals beneath it, and had Laurence's body placed on it. After the martyr had suffered the pain for a long time, the legend concludes, he made his famous cheerful remark, "It is well done. Turn me over!"

Almighty God,
who made Laurence a loving servant of your people
and a wise steward of the treasures of your Church:
fire us with his example to love as he loved
and to walk in the way that leads to eternal life;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

11th August – St Clare of Assisi

Born in 1194, Clare was 18 when she heard St Francis preaching, and was inspired by him. She asked him to help her live her life after the teaching of the Gospel.

Francis placed her in a Benedictine convent, despite the protests of her father. But Clare sought a deeper solitude, and she moved to another convent where she was joined by her sister. They remained there until a small dwelling was built for them next to the church of San Damiano.

They were joined by other ladies and lived lives of poverty, austerity and seclusion from the world. They were known as the Order of Poor Ladies, although this was renamed in her honour after her death as the Order of St Clare, commonly known as the Poor Clares. They became the second order of the Franciscan family, and their first rule was written by Francis. Unlike the male Franciscan order, who moved around, the Order of Poor Ladies lived in enclosure. They went around barefoot, slept on the ground, ate no meat, and observed almost complete silence.

Clare served the sick and washed the feet of the begging nuns. She came from prayer, it was said, with her face so shining it dazzled those about her. She suffered serious illness for the last 27 years of her life. Her influence was such that popes, cardinals, and bishops often came to consult her—Clare herself never left the walls of San Damiano.

Francis always remained her great friend and inspiration. Clare was always obedient to his will and to the great ideal of gospel life which he was making real.

Clare died on 11th August 1253.

God of peace,
who in the poverty of the blessed Clare
gave us a clear light to shine in the darkness of this world:
give us grace so to follow in her footsteps
that we may, at the last, rejoice with her in your eternal glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

14th August – St Maximilian Kolbe

Born on 8th January 1894 in Poland, Maximilian Kolbe joined the Franciscan order and was ordained priest in 1918.

He had a great devotion to Our Lady and spent much of his life and ministry promoting the veneration of her. He spent time teaching in Krakow seminary, followed by missionary work in Asia, returning to Poland in 1933. On 19 September 1939 he was arrested by German troops, and released on 8th December. He returned to the Franciscan monastery, where he continued his work of providing shelter for refugees, including Jews. He also published anti-Nazi literature.

On 17 February 1941 the German authorities closed down the monastery and head n four others were arrested by the Gestapo. He was transferred to Auschwitz on 28th May and given the prisoner number 16670.

He continued to act as a priest and was subject to beatings as a result of this. At the end of July 1941, one prisoner escaped from the camp, prompting the deputy camp commander, to pick ten men to be starved to death in an underground bunker to deter further escape attempts. When one of the selected men, Franciszek Gayownicek, cried out, "My wife! My children!", Kolbe volunteered to take his place.

According to an eyewitness, who was an assistant janitor at that time, in his prison cell, Kolbe led the prisoners in prayer. Each time the guards checked on him, he was standing or kneeling in the middle of the cell and looking calmly at those who entered. After they had been starved and deprived of water for two weeks, only Kolbe remained alive. The guards wanted the bunker emptied, so they gave Kolbe a lethal injection of carbolic acid. Kolbe is said to have raised his left arm and calmly waited for the deadly injection. He died on 14 August. His remains were cremated on 15 August, the feast of the Assumption.

O God, who filled the Priest and Martyr Saint Maximilian Kolbe
with a burning love for the Immaculate Virgin Mary
and with zeal for souls and love of neighbour,
graciously grant, through his intercession,
that, striving for your glory by eagerly serving others,
we may be conformed, even until death, to your Son.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

15th August – The Assumption of Mary (*in some churches kept on 16th August*)

We find homilies on the Assumption going back to the sixth century. In following centuries, the Eastern Churches held steadily to the doctrine, but some authors in the West were hesitant. However by the 13th century there was universal agreement. The feast was celebrated under various names—Commemoration, Dormition, Passing, Assumption—from at least the fifth or sixth century.

Scripture does not give an account of Mary's Assumption into heaven. Nevertheless, Revelation 12 speaks of a woman who is caught up in the battle between good and evil. Many see this woman as God's people. Since Mary best embodies the people of both Old and New Testaments, her Assumption can be seen as an exemplification of the woman's victory.

Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 15:20, Paul speaks of Christ's resurrection as the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Since Mary is closely associated with all the mysteries of Jesus' life, it is not surprising that the Holy Spirit has led the Church to believe in Mary's share in his glorification. So close was she to Jesus on earth, she must be with him body and soul in heaven.

In the light of the Assumption of Mary, it is easy to pray her Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) with new meaning. In her glory she proclaims the greatness of the Lord and finds joy in God her saviour. God has done marvels to her and she leads others to recognise God's holiness. She is the lowly handmaid who deeply revered her God and has been raised to the heights. From her position of strength she will help the lowly and the poor find justice on earth, and she will challenge the rich and powerful to distrust wealth and power as a source of happiness.

Almighty and everlasting God,
who stooped to raise fallen humanity
through the child-bearing of blessed Mary:
grant that we, who have seen your glory
revealed in our human nature
and your love made perfect in our weakness,
may daily be renewed in your image
and conformed to the pattern of your Son
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

20th August – St Bernard of Clairvaux

In the year 1111, at the age of 20, Bernard left his home to join the monastic community of Citeaux in France. His five brothers, two uncles, and some 30 young friends followed him into the monastery.

He lived the monastic life with devotion and fervour, and after four years the Abbot of Citeaux sent Bernard and 12 other monks to establish a new monastery in the nearby valley of Wormwoods, with Bernard as abbot. The zealous young man was quite demanding, though more on himself than others. A slight breakdown of health taught him to be more patient and understanding. The valley was soon renamed Clairvaux, the valley of light.

A skilled politician and negotiator he was lured more and more away from the monastery to settle long-standing disputes, as Popes sought his advice.

As well as a holy monk and adviser of the Pope, he was a defender of the faith, healed disputes and conflicts, reformed the monastic life, he was a great preacher, scripture scholar and theologian. He had a great devotion to Mary and wrote many books and sermons about her, which are still read widely today.

Bernard's life in the Church was more active than we can imagine possible today. His efforts produced far-reaching results. But he knew that they would have availed little without the many hours of prayer and contemplation that brought him strength and heavenly direction.

Merciful redeemer,
who, by the life and preaching of your servant Bernard,
rekindled the radiant light of your Church:
grant us, in our generation,
to be inflamed with the same spirit of discipline and love
and ever to walk before you as children of light;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

22nd August – Our Lady, Queen of Heaven

Those who have been on pilgrimage to Walsingham will be familiar with the mural in the Blessed Sacrament chapel of Jesus crowning Mary as Queen of Heaven. He bows her head as he places the crown on her. It is an image of inexpressible love. The image of Our Lady of Walsingham in the Holy House has a crown, and it was a popular image throughout England in medieval times.

How wonderful that meeting between son and mother must have been. Here is a meeting between God and the one creature who so perfectly responded to his grace that she became the new Eve; the perfection of his creation who would restore all that had been lost in the Garden of Eden.

The personality of Our Lady was so full of humility that she is never mentioned for herself, but only in relation to her Son. In her we see a model of contemplation and prayer. She was the one who humbly pondered all these things in her heart; her glory lay in her relationship to her Son.

Our Lady is closer to God than all the hosts of angels and saints, and yet she is the mother of all humanity.

Hail, Queen of Heaven, the Ocean Star,
Guide of the wanderer here below,
Thrown on life's surge, we claim thy care,
Save us from peril and from woe.
Mother of Christ, Star of the sea
Pray for the wanderer, pray for me.

O God, who made the Mother of your Son
to be our Mother and our Queen,
graciously grant that, sustained by her intercession,
we may attain in the heavenly Kingdom
the glory promised to your children.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

24th August – St Bartholomew

Bartholomew is listed as one of the 12 apostles in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, but apart from his name, we know very little else about him. Some scholars identify him with Nathaniel who is mentioned in John's Gospel and was summoned to Jesus.

We know almost nothing about most of the apostles. Yet the unknown ones were also foundation stones, the 12 pillars of the new Israel whose 12 tribes now encompass the whole earth. Their personalities were secondary—without thereby being demeaned—to their great office of bearing tradition from their first hand experience, speaking in the name of Jesus, putting the Word Made Flesh into human words for the enlightenment of the world. Their holiness was a gift that they had to share with others. The Good News was that all are called to the holiness of being Christ's members, by the gracious gift of God.

The simple fact is that humanity is totally meaningless unless God is its total concern. Then humanity, made holy with God's own holiness, becomes the most precious creation of God.

Almighty and everlasting God,
who gave to your apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach your word:
grant that your Church
may love that word which he believed
and may faithfully preach and receive the same;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

27th August – St. Monica

Born around 330 in present day Algeria, she was married when very young to the Roman pagan Patricius, who shared his mother's violent temper. Patricius' mother lived with the couple and the duo's temper flares proved to be a constant challenge to young Monica. While Monica's prayers and Christian deeds bothered Patricius, he is said to have respected her beliefs. They had three children: Augustine, Navigius, and Perpetua. Unfortunately, Monica was unable to baptize her children and when Augustine fell ill, Monica pleaded with Patricius to allow their son to be baptised. Patricius allowed it, but when Augustine was healthy again, he withdrew his permission.

For years Monica prayed for her husband and mother-in-law, until finally, one year before Patricius' death, she successfully converted them. Perpetua and Navigius entered the religious life, but unfortunately Augustine became lazy and uncouth. This greatly worried Monica, so when Patricius died, she sent the 17-year-old Augustine to Carthage for schooling. While in Carthage, Augustine became a Manichaeon, which was a major religion that saw the world as light and darkness, and when one died, they were removed from the world of matter and returned to the world of light, which is where life comes from. After Augustine got his education and returned home, he shared his views with Monica, who drove him from her table. Though it is not recorded how much time passed, Monica had a vision that convinced her to reconcile with her wayward son.

Inspired, Monica followed Augustine to Rome, where she learned he had left for Milan. She travelled to Milan and eventually came upon St. Ambrose, who helped her convert Augustine to Christianity following his seventeen-year resistance. After a period of six months, Augustine was baptised in the church of St. John the Baptist at Milan. The pair were led to believe they should spread the Word of God to Africa, but Monica passed away that year, 387.

Faithful God,
who strengthened Monica, the mother of Augustine, with wisdom,
and through her patient endurance encouraged him to seek after you:
give us the will to persist in prayer
that those who stray from you may be brought to faith in your Son Jesus Christ our
Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

28th August – St Augustine

St. Augustine of Hippo is the patron of brewers because of his conversion from a former life of loose living, which included parties, entertainment, and worldly ambitions. His complete turnaround and conversion has been an inspiration to many who struggle with a particular vice or habit they long to break.

This famous son of St Monica was born in Africa. Though he was one of the most intelligent men who ever lived and though he had been brought up a Christian, he turned away from the Christian faith. Through the prayers of his mother and the preaching of St. Ambrose, Augustine finally became convinced that Christianity was the one true religion.

He was baptized, became a priest, a bishop, a significant theologian, Founder of religious orders, and one of the greatest saints that ever lived. He became very devout and charitable, too. On the wall of his room he had the following sentence written in large letters: "Here we do not speak evil of anyone." St. Augustine overcame strong heresies, practiced great poverty and supported the poor, preached very often and prayed with great fervour right up until his death."

A famous quote from Augustine is worth pondering today as we celebrate his feast: "God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you."

Merciful Lord,
who turned Augustine from his sins
to be a faithful bishop and teacher:
grant that we may follow him in penitence and discipline
till our restless hearts find their rest in you;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

29th August – Beheading of St John the Baptist

From today's Gospel reading, Mark 6:17-29:

Herod sent to have John arrested, and had him chained up in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married. For John had told Herod, 'It is against the law for you to have your brother's wife.' As for Herodias, she was furious with him and wanted to kill him; but she was not able to, because Herod was afraid of John, knowing him to be a good and holy man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him.

An opportunity came on Herod's birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee. When the daughter of this same Herodias came in and danced, she delighted Herod and his guests; so the king said to the girl, 'Ask me anything you like and I will give it you.' And he swore her an oath, 'I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the Baptist.' The girl hurried straight back to the king and made her request, 'I want you to give me John the Baptist's head, here and now, on a dish.' The king was deeply distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he was reluctant to break his word to her. So the king at once sent one of the bodyguard with orders to bring John's head. The man went off and beheaded him in prison; then he brought the head on a dish and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When John's disciples heard about this, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Almighty God,
who called your servant John the Baptist
to be the forerunner of your Son in birth and death:
strengthen us by your grace
that, as he suffered for the truth,
so we may boldly resist corruption and vice
and receive with him the unfading crown of glory;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

31st August – St Aidan

We know very little about Aidan's early life, except that he probably was of Irish descent and from an early age was a monk on the island of Iona in the monastery that had been founded by St Columba.

In 633, King Oswald gained the crown of Northumbria and vowed to bring Christianity back. He requested that missionaries were sent from Iona. At first they sent Bishop Croman, but his methods were harsh and alienated many people, he returned to Iona and was replaced by Aidan. Aidan, with 12 other monks founded a monastery on Lindisfarne and Aidan was made bishop in 635.

An Irish speaker, Aidan had to learn English as he went about his missionary work. His missionary work was inspirational; he would walk from one village to another, politely talking to the people he met and slowly interesting them in Christianity. He took an interest in their lives and communities and spoke to them on their own level. By doing this, he patiently and slowly restored Christianity to Northumbria.

He built churches across the area and was known for his simplicity of life and care for the poor.

Aidan died in the year 651.

Everlasting God,
you sent the gentle bishop Aidan
to proclaim the gospel in this land:
grant us to live as he taught
in simplicity, humility and love for the poor;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.