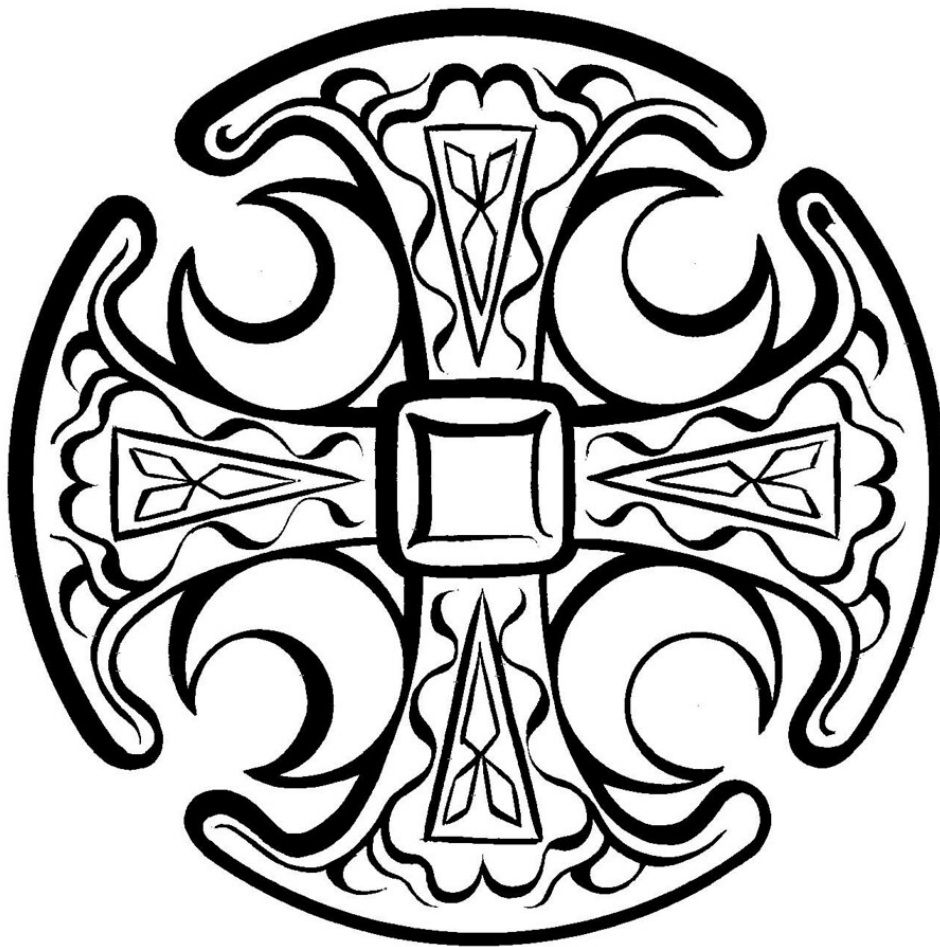


# Saints of the Month

*A selection of lives of the saints for May 2020*



THE CHURCH UNION



The Society  
under the patronage of Saint Wilfrid and Saint Hilda

## 8<sup>th</sup> May – Julian of Norwich

Although not canonised as a saint by the Church, Julian has been popular in people's devotion, and interest in her continues to this day. She has also been held up as a model of how we live out our lives during Coronavirus.

We know very few biographical details of her life, but know that she was born around 1343, and is assumed to have spent most of her life in Norwich. She would have lived through the Black Death and various other tumultuous events. In 1373, Julian was seriously ill and had received the last rites. On 8<sup>th</sup> May she had a series of visions of Jesus enduring his passion and saw his bleeding body. As part of these visions he had an insight into the love that Jesus has for us, and there was a feeling of her being enfolded in his love.

Julian recovered and wrote down her visions in two versions. The longer of which is known to us now as the Revelations of Divine Love and is a very important book as it is the earliest surviving book in the English language to be written by a woman. Her message in her book is one of hope and of trust in God's goodness. One of her most enduring quotes is *"all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well."*

Julian lived her life as an anchoress, in a cell attached to St Julian's Church in Norwich (we are not even sure of her real name, and she may have taken the name of the church). This was a life of solitude and prayer – one of self-isolation. She offered her life and prayer for that of the Church. She spoke to visitors who came to her cell seeking her spiritual counsel, which must have been very important in a world with so much upheaval.

You can visit the site of Julian's cell and her shrine at St Julian's Church in Norwich (currently closed due to Coronavirus), where there is also the Julian centre which celebrates her life.

Most holy God, the ground of our beseeching,  
who through your servant Julian revealed the wonders of your love:  
grant that as we are created in your nature and restored by your grace,  
our wills may be so made one with yours  
that we may come to see you face to face and gaze on you for ever;  
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.

## 14<sup>th</sup> May – St Matthias

St Matthias is unique amongst the Apostles as he was the only one not appointed by Jesus himself. Instead he was chosen in the period between the Ascension and Pentecost to take the place of Judas, and bring the number of the Apostles back to twelve.

Twelve was an important number. It was the number chosen by Jesus and thought to mirror the twelve tribes of Israel, and so it was important to have twelve Apostles. The account of the appointment of Matthias is found in Acts 1: 15-26. Two candidates were put forward, Matthias and Joseph Barsabbas. Those present prayed for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and cast lots, and Matthias was chosen. Matthias is not mentioned in the Gospels, but Acts describes him as a follower of Jesus. In fact this passage from Acts is the first – and last – mention of Matthias in the New Testament. Some traditions say that he spread the faith around Cappadocia and the Caspian Sea.

Some calendars have his feast day as 24<sup>th</sup> February, but 14<sup>th</sup> May was chosen due to its proximity to the feasts of the Ascension and Pentecost when he was chosen as an Apostle.

Almighty God,  
who in the place of the traitor Judas  
chose your faithful servant Matthias  
to be of the number of the Twelve:  
preserve your Church from false apostles  
and, by the ministry of faithful pastors and teachers,  
keep us steadfast in your truth;  
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.

## 19<sup>th</sup> May – St Dunstan

Dunstan was born in 909 to a noble family in Somerset, near to Glastonbury, and it was at Glastonbury Abbey where he received his early education from Irish monks.

He entered into the service of his uncle, who was Archbishop of Canterbury, and was then appointed to the court of King Athelstan. During his life, Dunstan would serve as an advisor to kings and was also heavily involved in secular politics. It was this role that caused people, throughout his life, to be jealous of him and he was subject to plots and was at times exiled.

In 943 he received Holy Orders and returned to Glastonbury Abbey where he lived as a hermit. It was during this time that he developed his skills as a musician, illustrator and a metal worker; and he is the patron saint of armourers and goldsmiths.

Dunstan was elected Abbot of Glastonbury and he set about a reform of the monastery making it a place of great learning. Throughout his life the revival and reform of monasticism, which had been very depleted since Danish invasions, was very important to him and was one of his greatest legacies.

In 957 he was consecrated a Bishop and was appointed as Bishop of Worcester, and the following year the Bishop of London (whilst remaining Bishop of Worcester). He was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 960. Dunstan compiled the coronation rite for King Edgar at Bath, and this forms the basis for the coronation rite that is still in use. As Archbishop he was able to continue his revival of the monasteries, and he drew up the Regularis Concordia, which was a document that prescribed a uniform rule of observance of Benedictine life to be adopted by all monasteries in England.

He died in Canterbury on 19<sup>th</sup> May 988, and devotion to him quickly grew, and he became one of the most popular Anglo-Saxon saints.

Almighty God,  
who raised up Dunstan to be a true shepherd of the flock,  
a restorer of monastic life and a faithful counsellor to those in authority:  
give to all pastors the same gifts of your Holy Spirit  
that they may be true servants of Christ and of all his people;  
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.

## 20<sup>th</sup> May – St Bernadine of Siena

In the year 1400, a 20 year old Bernadine came to the door of the largest hospital in Siena. A plague was raging through the city with a great number of deaths, and many of the people who died were those who were needed to tend the sick. It was a desperate situation, more and more people were falling ill and fewer and fewer people were there to help them.

Bernadine had not come because he was ill but because he wanted to help. And he brought not new patients but young men like himself willing to tend the dying. For four months Bernardine and his companions worked day and night not only to comfort the patients but to organise and clean the hospital. Only at the end of the plague did Bernardine himself fall ill -of exhaustion.

It was this devotion to service that marked Bernadine's life. He became a priest and a Franciscan missionary, and travelled throughout Italy preaching the Gospel. It was said that his voice was weak and hoarse, but when he preached his voice became stronger. He had a simple preaching style that was familiar and he used lots of imagery taken from themes in everyday life. He drew large crowds despite choosing to often preach at 6:00 in the morning and is regarded as being very important in reviving the faith in Italy. He also had a great devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus, and spread this devotion to others.

In 1438 he became Vicar General of the Franciscans and was able to send missionaries to carry our preaching work, especially in Asia. But his role restricted his own preaching ministry, and in 1442 he asked the Pope to relieve him of his position as Vicar General so that he could resume his preaching ministry. This is what he did until his death on 20 May 1444.

O God, who gave the Priest Saint Bernardine of Siena  
a great love for the holy Name of Jesus,  
grant, through his merits and prayers,  
that we may ever be set aflame  
with the spirit of your love.  
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.

## 22<sup>nd</sup> May – St Rita of Cascia

Born in 1381, she was a devout girl in her early years and longed to become a nun. However, she was married at the age of 12 to a man who was abusive and had many enemies. They had two sons who shared their father's anger and violent nature.

Rita remained faithful to her devout way of life and towards the end of his life had converted her husband to a better way of living. However, he was killed by his enemies shortly afterwards. Rita forgave his killers, but her sons wanted revenge for their father's death. Rita pleaded with her sons but was not successful. She thought her only way of saving her sons from the sin of murder was to ask God to take their lives. They died of natural causes a year afterwards.

Rita sought to enter a convent to live out her vocation as a nun. After several setbacks in this she was eventually received into an Augustinian convent aged 36. She was known for a devout prayer life and devotion to the passion of Jesus. Rita asked God that she might share in his suffering and as an answer to her prayer a wound appeared on her forehead as if a thorn from the crown of thorns had pierced her. This stayed with her for the remainder of her life, and caused her great suffering. She died from Tuberculosis on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1457.

She is regarded as the patron saint of lost or impossible causes. We pray today for all victims of domestic abuse, especially those whose situation has become worse with the Coronavirus lockdown.

Bestow on us, we pray, O Lord,  
the wisdom and strength of the Cross,  
with which you were pleased to endow Saint Rita,  
so that, suffering in every tribulation with Christ,  
we may participate ever more deeply in his Paschal Mystery.  
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

## 25<sup>th</sup> May – The Venerable Bede

Bede is a saint whose writings are incredibly important to our knowledge of the history of the Christian faith in England, but we sadly know very little about his own life. Most of what we know about him is taken from the last chapter of his book *‘The Ecclesiastical History of the English People’*, where he writes a short history of his own life.

He was born around 672 in the north of England, near Wearmouth monastery. In due course he joined this monastery, and spent all of his life there or at Jarrow, where he dedicated his life to reading and writing.

He was an outstanding author of his time and wrote commentaries on the Scriptures, as well as a collection of writings on the lives of the saints. As mentioned, his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* is his most important work, and is vital resource for our knowledge not just of the history of Christianity in England, but of England’s history generally.

He died at Jarrow on 25 May 735. He was teaching and working until the last moments of his life, giving instructions for his work to be finished and dictating the last chapter of a book he was writing. St Cuthbert wrote down an account of his final hours, as his brother monks finished writing the book for him, and he died praising God.

Bede was regarded as a ‘light of the Church’ for providing so much teaching and writing in what is often referred to as the Dark Ages.

God our maker,  
whose Son Jesus Christ gave to your servant Bede  
grace to drink in with joy the word that leads us to know you and to love you:  
in your goodness  
grant that we also may come at length to you,  
the source of all wisdom,  
and stand before your face;  
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.

## 26<sup>th</sup> or 27<sup>th</sup> May – St Augustine of Canterbury

Christianity in Britain had started early, but had experienced difficulties following the invasions in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. Pope Gregory the Great organised a group of 30 monks, led by their prior Augustine, to sail to southeast England to spread the Gospel. They landed in the territory of Kent, ruled by King Ethelbert, a pagan married to a Christian, Bertha. Ethelbert received them kindly, set up a residence for them in Canterbury and within the year, on Pentecost Sunday 597, was himself baptized. After being consecrated a bishop in France, Augustine returned to Canterbury, where he founded his see. He constructed a church and monastery near where the present cathedral, begun in 1070, now stands. As the faith spread, additional sees were established at London and Rochester.

Work was sometimes slow and Augustine did not always meet with success. Attempts to reconcile the Anglo-Saxon Christians with the original Briton Christians—who had been driven into western England by Anglo-Saxon invaders—ended in dismal failure. Augustine failed to convince the Britons to give up certain Celtic customs at variance with Rome and to forget their bitterness, helping him evangelise their Anglo-Saxon conquerors.

Labouring patiently, Augustine wisely heeded the missionary principles—quite enlightened for the times—suggested by Pope Gregory: purify rather than destroy pagan temples and customs; let pagan rites and festivals be transformed into Christian feasts; retain local customs as far as possible. The limited success Augustine achieved in England before his death in 605, a short eight years after his arrival, would eventually bear fruit long after in the conversion of England. Augustine of Canterbury can truly be called the “Apostle of England.”

Almighty God,  
whose servant Augustine was sent as the apostle of the English people:  
grant that as he laboured in the Spirit to preach Christ’s gospel in this land,  
so all who hear the good news  
may strive to make your truth known in all the world;  
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.