

British Saints

British Saints



Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints (Psalm 115:6)

Since the time of the establishment of the Diocese of Sourozh, and throughout the time of the pastoral service of His Eminence Metropolitan Anthony of blessed memory, the clergy and faithful of our diocese have sought to preserve and honour the memory of the many Saints of God who shone forth in these islands of Britain, labouring to preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, bearing witness to Him through martyrdom, monastic struggle or through their pastoral service in the Church of God.

The Holy Tradition of our church recounts how, from the time of the Holy Apostles, who followed the Lord's command to 'Go and teach all nations' (*Matt 28:19*), the Good News of our Lord and Saviour was preached in the land of Britain, being brought here by the Holy Apostles themselves, among them the Apostle Simon the Zealot, the Righteous Joseph of Arimathea and the Apostle Aristobulus of the Seventy. Later, as witnessed to by the early histories of the Church, the God-Preserved Emperor Constantine was proclaimed Emperor in the city of York, his mother the Holy Empress Helena being of British lineage.



The Columba, Abbot of Iona

(+597)

ST COLUMBA (also known as Columcille, meaning 'Dove of the Church') was born in Donegal on December 7, 521 to noble Irish parents. He became a monk and was soon ordained priest. Tradition asserts that, sometime around 560, he became involved a dispute over the right to copy an edition of the Psalter. The dispute eventually led to the Battle of Cul Dremhe in 561, during which many men were killed. As a penance for these deaths, Columba was ordered to make the same number of new converts as had been killed in the battle. He was also ordered to leave Ireland and move such that he could not see his native country.

He travelled to Scotland, where it is reputed he first landed at the southern tip of the Kintyre peninsula, near Southend. However, being still in sight of his native land he moved further north up the west coast of Scotland. In 563 he founded a monastery on the island of Iona off the west coast of Scotland which became the centre of his evangelising mission to Scotland. There are many stories of miracles which he performed during his mission to convert the Picts, the people who dwelt in Scotland in those days. In one story in his life, in 565 the saint came across a group of Picts who were burying a man killed by a monster that lived in the waters of Loch Ness, and brought the man back to life. In another version, he is said to have saved the man while he was being attacked, driving away the monster with the sign of the cross.

The primary source on the life of St. Columba is the Life of St. Columba, a hagiography by St. Adamnan of Iona. St Columba is believed to be buried together with St Patrick and St Brigid of Kildare in Downpatrick in County Down, deep within the famous Hill of Down. His feast day is June 9.



The Holy Hierarch Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury

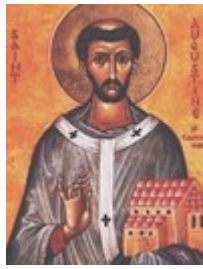
(+690, commemorated September 19)

SAINT THEODORE was the eighth Archbishop of Canterbury (668-690), and one of England's great saints. He was a Greek from Tarsus, the home of the Holy Apostle Paul. He was a highly-educated monk living in Rome who was quickly advanced through all the clerical ranks and consecrated as Archbishop of Canterbury at the age of sixty-five. St Adrian, an African who was the abbot of a monastery near Naples, was sent to assist St Theodore.

St Theodore arrived in Kent in 669, when he was almost seventy years old. In spite of his age, he was quite energetic, travelling throughout England, founding churches and consecrating bishops to fill those Sees which were left vacant by an outbreak of plague. He also created new Sees and established a school in Canterbury where Greek was taught. St Theodore summoned a council of the entire English Church at Hertford in 672. Not only was this the first church council in England, it was the first assembly of any kind attended by representatives from all over the country. In 679 he convened another synod at Hatfield to maintain the purity of Orthodox doctrine and to condemn the heresy of Monothelism.

St Theodore fell asleep in the Lord in 690, and his body remained incorrupt for a long time. Under his leadership, the English Church became united in a way that the various tribal kingdoms did not. The diocesan structures which he established continue to serve as the basis for church administration in England. He was respected for his administrative skills, and also for his moral and canonical decisions. The History of the English Church and People of St Bede gives detailed information about St Theodore's life and work as Archbishop of Canterbury (Books IV and V).

The feast of St Theodore is kept on the nineteenth day of September each year.



The Holy Hierarch Augustine, Archbishop of Canterbury

(+604, commemorated May 26)

ST AUGUSTINE was from Italy, and a disciple of St Felix, Bishop of Messana. St Gregory Dialogus, Pope of Rome, chose him to lead a mission of forty monks to evangelize the people of Britain. They arrived at Ebbsfleet (on the isle of Thanet) in Kent in 597.

King Ethelbert, whose Frankish wife Bertha was a Christian, welcomed them. They were allowed to base their mission at the ancient church of St Martin in Canterbury, which was restored for their use. This church had been built during the Roman occupation of Britain, and the queen often went there to pray. At first, the king was reluctant to give up his pagan beliefs, but he promised not to harm them, and to supply them with whatever they needed. He also promised that he would not prevent them from preaching Christianity. St Augustine later converted the king to Christianity, along with thousands of his subjects.

St. Bede says that St Augustine was consecrated as Archbishop of Britain by Archbishop Etherius of Arles (others say that it was his successor St Virgilius of Arles who consecrated St Augustine). Returning to Britain, he committed himself to the work of evangelizing the country with renewed zeal. St Augustine built a church dedicated to Christ the Saviour, the predecessor of the present cathedral at Canterbury, consecrated on June 9, 603 (according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle). He also founded the monastery of Sts Peter and Paul east of the city. Here St Augustine, the Archbishops of Canterbury, and the Kings of Kent were buried. The monastery, now in ruins, was later known as St Augustine's Monastery. The saint was instrumental in founding the dioceses of Rochester and London. In 604 he consecrated St Justus and St Mellitus as bishops for those Sees. St Augustine also helped the king draft the earliest Anglo-Saxon laws, and founded a school in Canterbury.

Known in his lifetime as a wonderworker, St Augustine fell asleep in the Lord on May 26, 604. He was laid to rest at the entrance of the unfinished church of Sts Peter and Paul. When the church was dedicated in 613, his holy relics were placed inside. An epitaph was composed for his tomb. In part, it reads: 'Here lies the Lord Augustine, first Archbishop of Canterbury, sent here by blessed Gregory, bishop of the city of Rome, who with the help of God, and aided by miracles, guided King Ethelbert and his people from the worship of idols to the Faith of Christ.' St Bede gives detailed information about St Augustine's mission to Britain in his History of the English Church and People (Book I, 23-33. Book II, 1-3).

The feast of St Augustine is kept on the twenty-sixth day of May.



The Venerable Hilda, Abbess of Whitby

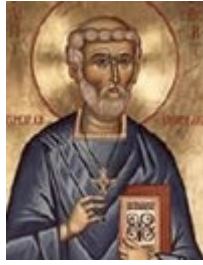
(+680, commemorated November 17)

ST HILDA (614-680) was abbess of the great Whitby Abbey in northern England in the seventh century. She was the daughter of Hereric, the nephew of King Edwin of Northumbria, and like her great-uncle became a Christian through the preaching of St. Paulinus of York, about the year 627, when she was thirteen years old.

Moved by the example of her sister Hereswith, who had become a nun at Chelles in Gaul, Hilda journeyed to East Anglia, intending to follow her sister abroad. But St. Aidan recalled her to her own country, and after leading a monastic life for a while on the north bank of the Wear and afterwards at Hartlepool, where she ruled a double monastery of monks and nuns with great success, Hilda eventually undertook to set in order a monastery at Streaneshalch, a place to which the Danes a century or two later gave the name of Whitby.

Under the rule of St. Hilda the monastery at Whitby became very famous. The Holy Scriptures were specially studied there, and no less than five of the monastics became bishops, among them St. John, Bishop of Hexham, and St. Wilfrid, Bishop of York. In Whitby, in 664, was held the famous synod which confirmed, among other issues, the manner of calculating the date of Pascha. The fame of St. Hilda's wisdom was so great that from far and near monks and even royal personages came to consult her. Seven years before her death the saint was stricken down with a grievous fever which never left her till she breathed her last, but, in spite of this, she neglected none of her duties to God or to her spiritual children. She passed away most peacefully after receiving the Holy Mysteries of Christ, and the tolling of the monastery bell was heard miraculously at Hackness thirteen miles away, where also a devout nun named Begu saw the soul of St. Hilda borne to heaven by angels.

The life of St Hilda is recorded by Bede in his History of the English Church and People. The veneration of St. Hilda from an early period is attested by the inclusion of her name in the calendar of St. Willibrord, written at the beginning of the eighth century. According to one tradition, her relics were translated to Glastonbury by King Edmund, Another tradition holds that St. Edmund brought her relics to Gloucester. Her is kept on the seventeenth day of November.



The Holy Hierarch Cuthbert , Bishop of Lindisfarne

(+687, commemorated March 20)

ST CUTHBERT, the wonderworker of Britain, was born in Northumbria around 634. While still young, tending his master's sheep, he had a vision of angels taking the soul of St Aidan to heaven in a fiery sphere. Several days later he learned that Bishop Aidan of Lindisfarne had reposed at the very hour that Cuthbert had seen his vision.

As an adult, St Cuthbert decided to leave the world and embrace the monastic life. He entered the monastery at Melrose, where he devoted himself to serving God. His fasting and vigils were so extraordinary that the other monks marvelled at him. He often spent entire nights in prayer, and would not eat anything for days at a time. St Cuthbert was subsequently chosen to be abbot of Melrose, guiding the brethren by his words and by his example. He made journeys throughout the surrounding area to encourage Christians and to preach the Gospel to those who had never heard it. He also worked many miracles, healing the sick and freeing those who were possessed by demons.

In 664, Cuthbert moved to Lindisfarne, being appointed as prior. While at Lindisfarne, St Cuthbert continued his habit of visiting the common people in order to inspire them to seek the Kingdom of Heaven. Though some of the monks preferred their negligent way of life to the way of asceticism, through his patience and gentle admonition St Cuthbert gradually brought them to obedience and a better state of mind. The saint did not hesitate to correct those who did wrong. However, his gentleness made him quick to forgive those who repented. When people confessed to him, he often wept in sympathy with their weakness and often fulfilled their penances himself.

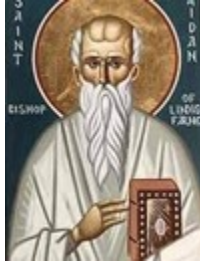
St Cuthbert was a true father to his monks, but his soul longed for complete solitude, so he went to live on a small island (St Cuthbert's Isle), a short distance from Lindisfarne. After gaining victory over the demons through prayer and fasting, the saint decided to move even farther away from his fellow men. In 676, he retired to Inner Farne, an even more remote location. St Cuthbert built a small cell which could not be seen from the mainland. A few yards away, he built a guest house for visitors from Lindisfarne. Here he remained for nearly nine years.

A synod at Twyford, with the holy Archbishop Theodore presiding, elected Cuthbert Bishop of Hexham in 684. Bishop Cuthbert remained as humble as he had been before his consecration, avoiding finery and dressing in simple clothing. He fulfilled his office with dignity and graciousness, while continuing to live as a monk. He served as a bishop for only two years, however. Sensing that the time of his death was approaching, St Cuthbert laid aside his arch-pastoral duties, retiring to solitude to prepare himself.

Counselling his brethren immediately before his death, St Cuthbert spoke of peace and harmony, warning them to be on guard against those who fostered pride and discord. Although he encouraged them to welcome visitors and offer them hospitality, he also admonished them to have no dealings with heretics or with those who lived evil lives. He told them to learn the teachings of the Fathers and put them into practice, and to adhere to the monastic rule which he had taught them. After partaking of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, St Cuthbert surrendered his holy soul to God on March 20, 687.

Eleven years later, St Cuthbert's tomb was opened and his relics were found to be incorrupt. In the subsequent centuries, the relics were moved several times because of the threat of invasion. They were finally brought to Durham for safekeeping. The saint's relics were opened again on August 24, 1104, and the incorrupt and fragrant relics were placed in the newly-completed cathedral.

In 1537 three commissioners of King Henry VIII came to plunder the tomb and desecrate the relics. St Cuthbert's body was still incorrupt, and was later reburied. The tomb was opened again in 1827. In the inner casket was a skeleton wrapped in a linen shroud and five robes. In the vestments a gold and garnet cross was found, probably St Cuthbert's pectoral cross. Also found were an ivory comb, a portable wood and silver altar, an epitachelion, pieces of a carved wooden coffin, and other items. These may be seen to this day in the treasury of Durham Cathedral. The feast of St Cuthbert is kept on the twentieth day of March.



The Holy Hierarch Aidan, Bishop of Lindisfarne

(+651, commemorated August 31)

ST AIDAN was born in Ireland (then called Scotland) in the seventh century. As a monk of the monastery founded by St Columba on the island of Iona, he was known for his strict asceticism. When the holy King Oswald of Northumbria wanted to convert his people to Christianity, he turned to the Celtic monks of Iona, rather than the Roman clergy at Canterbury. St Aidan was consecrated bishop and sent to Northumbria to take charge of the mission. King Oswald gave him the island of Lindisfarne near the royal residence of Bamburgh for his episcopal See. St Aidan founded the famous monastery on Lindisfarne in 635.

As bishop, St Aidan was renowned for his humility and piety, a model for other bishops and priests to follow. He was not attached to the things of this world, nor did he seek earthly treasures. Whenever he received gifts from the king or from rich men, he distributed them to the poor. On Wednesdays and Fridays he would fast from all food until the ninth hour, except during the paschal season. From Lindisfarne, St Aidan travelled all over Northumbria, visiting his flock and establishing missions. Oswald, who knew Gaelic from the time he and his family were exiled to Iona, acted as an interpreter for Bishop Aidan, who did not speak English. Thus, the king played an active role in the conversion of his people.

One year, after attending the services of Pascha, King Oswald sat down to a meal with Bishop Aidan. Just as the bishop was about to bless the food, a servant came in and informed the king that a great number of needy folk were outside begging for alms. The king ordered that his own food be served to the poor on silver platters, and that the silver serving dishes be broken up and distributed to them.

St Oswald was killed in battle in 642 in his thirty-ninth year. St Aidan was deeply grieved by the king's death, but his successor the holy right-believing King Oswin was also very dear to him. St Aidan foretold the death of King Oswin, saying that his people did not deserve such a good ruler. The prophecy was soon fulfilled, for St Oswin was murdered on August 20, 651. St Aidan departed to the Lord on August 31, less than two weeks later. He died at Bamburgh, by the west wall of the church. The beam on which he was leaning to support himself still survives, even though the church was twice destroyed by fire. The beam may still be seen in the ceiling of the present church, above the baptismal font. At first, the holy bishop Aidan was buried at Lindisfarne on the right side of the altar in the church of St Peter. Later, the saint's relics were translated to Iona, the monastery where he had originally embraced the monastic life. His feast is kept on the thirty-first day of August.



The Holy Hierarch Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland

(+493, commemorated April 17)

ST PATRICK was a Romano-Briton by birth. He was probably born in 390 on what is now the north-west coast of England at an unidentified place called Bannavem Taburniae. The son of a town councillor, his grandfather had been a priest. Bearing the Roman name 'Patricius', meaning 'noble', he was brought up to speak Latin but paid no attention to the teachings of Christianity.

When he was about fifteen years old, he was captured by Irish pirates and reduced to slavery to tend herds for six years. As a shepherd boy, he often came to pray and so know God. After these six years, he was told in a dream that he was to return to his own land. He either escaped or was freed and eventually managed to return to his family. Here he received training for the priesthood and travelled to monasteries in Gaul, where he stayed for some time. They may have included the monastery of Lerins in the south of France, where there was a famous monastery founded under the influence of the great Egyptian monks like St Anthony the Great.

In about 435, Patrick returned to Ireland from Gaul as a Bishop. He set up his See in the north of Ireland at Armagh and encouraged the monastic life there. He also set up a school in Armagh and from there made many missionary journeys, preaching, teaching, baptising and building churches and monasteries. Bishop Patrick has left us writings that have survived to this day. There exists his Confession, or autobiography, a letter condemning slavery and also his remarkable 'Breastplate', in which he confesses his utter faith in Christ. It is clear that Patrick was extremely humble and devoted to Christ; he was an extraordinary shepherd of souls. Tradition relates that he expelled all demons and snakes from Ireland. To this day, there are no poisonous snakes to be found in Ireland. He also taught of the mystery of the Oneness and Threeness of the Holy Trinity using shamrock, a local plant whose leaves are formed of three parts and yet are one. Much revered, he reposed in the Lord about 461.

Today St Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland. He is the most popular of all the Irish saints as he is considered to be responsible for the successful introduction of Christianity to Ireland. Several places are connected with him in Ireland, such as Armagh, Downpatrick, Croagh Patrick and Saul, although the whereabouts of his relics is now unknown. There was also much devotion to him from early times not only in Ireland but also on the south-west coast of Wales and the north-west coast of England, for example at Heysham. St Patrick's feast is kept on 17 March.



The Holy Hierarch David of Wales, Bishop of Menevia

(+601, commemorated March 1)

ST DAVID was born in the sixth century in Wales. As a young man he became a monk and studied for many years as a priest. According to one tradition he was consecrated Bishop by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, when David went on pilgrimage there. He worked extensively to spread Christianity in Wales, especially in south-west Wales in what is now Pembrokeshire. Here he founded a monastery at Mynyw (Menevia), now St David's, and he is honoured as the first Bishop of St David's.

David and his monks followed a very austere rule, drinking only water and eating only bread and vegetables. Emulating the customs of the monks of the Egyptian desert with a regime of manual labour and study, his monastery became a nursery of saints. Personally, David was a most merciful man and practised frequent prostrations. As a favourite ascetic act he would often immerse himself in cold water while repeating the Psalms by heart. We know that he attended the Church Council of Brevi in c. 545 and here by common consent it is said that he was made Archbishop and his monastery proclaimed the Mother-Church of all Wales. He is said to have founded twelve monasteries, one of which may have been at Glastonbury in Somerset, the place where the Apostle Aristobulus of the Seventy and Righteous Joseph of Arimathea had, by tradition, first preached the Gospel in Britain and built the first church centuries before.

St David worked many miracles even during his lifetime. After his repose in about 600, he came to be venerated widely in south Wales, but he was also revered in Ireland, Cornwall and Brittany. Indeed some believe that he actually travelled to Cornwall and Brittany and founded monasteries there too.

St David's relics survive to this day and are enshrined in his cathedral at St David's. St David is associated with the daffodil, the national flower of Wales, which is said to have grown around the site of his monastery. The leek, another national symbol of Wales, is said to have grown wild in the same place and to have formed the basis of the diet of St David and his monks. St David's feast, the Welsh national day, falls on 1 March.



The Holy Protomartyr Alban

(+304, commemorated June 22)

ST ALBAN was the first martyr in the British Isles; he was put to death at Verulamium (now called Saint Albans after him), perhaps during the persecution under the emperor Diocletian in the year 303 or 304, although some say that he gave his life in the reign of the emperor Septimus Severus, around 209.

According to the story told by St Bede the Venerable, St Alban sheltered in his house a priest who was fleeing from his persecutors. He was so impressed by the goodness of his guest that he eagerly received his teaching and received Baptism. In a few days it was known that the priest lay concealed in St Alban's house, and soldiers were sent to seize him. Thereupon the St Alban put on the priest's clothes and gave himself up in his stead to be tried. The judge asked St Alban, 'Of what family are you?' The saint answered, 'That is a matter of no concern to you. I would have you know that I am a Christian.' The judge persisted, and the saint said, 'I was called Alban by my parents, and I worship the living and true God, the creator of all things.' Then the judge said, 'If you wish to enjoy eternal life, sacrifice to the great gods at once!' the saint replied, 'You sacrifice to demons, who can bring no help or answer to the desires of the heart. The reward of such sacrifices is the endless punishment of Hell.'

The judge was angered at the priest's escape and threatened the saint with death if he persisted in forsaking the gods of Rome. He replied firmly that he was a Christian, and would not burn incense to the pagan gods. He was condemned to be beaten and then beheaded.

As he was led to the place of execution (the hill on which Saint Albans abbey church now stands) it is said that, by the martyr's prayers, the crowd who accompanied him to his place of execution were enabled to cross the river Coln dry-shod. This miracle so touched the heart of the executioner that he flung down his sword, threw himself at St Alban's feet, avowing himself a Christian, and begged to suffer either for him or with him. Another soldier picked up the sword, and in the words of Bede, 'the valiant martyr's head was stricken off, and he received the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him.' A spring of water gushed forth from the place of the martyr's execution, and it is said that, at the moment at which the saint's head fell to the ground, the eyes of his executioner fell out of their sockets. Before this spectacle, the governor ordered that the persecution of Christians cease, and that due honour be paid to the glorious martyrs of Christ. From that time, many sick people found healing through the numerous miracles wrought at St Alban's tomb, and his veneration spread throughout England and also in Europe. The shrine of St Alban had lain empty since the destruction of the English monasteries by King Henry VIII, but in 2002 a portion of the martyr's relics was taken there from the church of St Panteleimon in Cologne, Germany, where they had been preserved for many centuries. These relics now lie once more at the place of the saint's martyrdom.

Source: <http://www.souroz.org/british-saints-eng-index/>