

Evensong: Exploring the Church Fathers

25/9/16

“The Venerable Bede”

“When dawn broke on Wednesday, he told us to write diligently what we had begun and we did this until Terce (a service forming part of the Divine Office of the Western Christian Church, traditionally said (or chanted) at the third hour of the day (i.e. 9am). After Terce we walked in procession with the relics of the Saints as the customs of the day required, but one of us remained with him, who said, “There is still a chapter missing in the book that you have been dictating; but it seems hard that I should trouble you any further.”

“It is no trouble,” he answered: “Take your pen and sharpen it, and write quickly.” And he did so. But at None he said to me, “I have a few articles of value in my casket, such as pepper, linen and incense. Run quickly and fetch the priests of monastery, so that I may distribute among them the gifts that God has given me.” In great distress I did as he bid me. And when they arrived, he spoke to each of them in turn, requesting and reminding them diligently to offer Masses and prayers for him. They readily promised to do so, and all were sad and wept, grieving above all else at his statement that they must not expect to see his face much longer in the world. But they were heartened when he said, “If it be the will of my Maker, the time has come when I shall be freed from the body and return to Him who created me out of nothing when I had no being. I have had a long life, and the merciful Judge has ordered it graciously. The time of my departure is at hand, and my soul longs to see Christ my King in His beauty. “He told us many other edifying things, and passed his last day happily until evening. Then the same lad, named Wilbert, said again:”Dear master, there is one sentence still unfinished.”

“Very well,” he replied:”write it down.” After a short while the lad said, “Now it is finished.”

“You have spoken truly,” he replied: “It is well finished.” Now raise my head in your hands, for it would give me great joy to sit facing the holy place where I used to pray, so that I may sit and call on my Father.” And thus, on the floor of

his cell, he chanted, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit." to its ending, and breathed his last.

(Read from "Bede: A History of the English Church and People" p20)

Bede, also referred to as Saint Bede or Venerable Bede was an English monk at the monastery of St Peter at Monkwearmouth near Jarrow in the Kingdom of Northumbria.

Historians place his birth date around the year 672 or 673 AD. Records seem to indicate that Bede came from a noble family background. At the age of seven, Bede was sent to the monastery at Monkwearmouth by his family in order to be educated by the clergy. This was a fairly common practice at the time.

During his upbringing in the monastery records tell of a plague that broke out causing the death of many of the monks. Only two people survived who were able to chant the full offices. One of them was a boy. The young boy was most certainly Bede.

In about 692, when Bede was nineteen, he was ordained Deacon. This was an exception to the rule where you had to be normally twenty-five to be ordained. The reason was most probably Bede's exceptional capabilities.

In Bede's 30th year, in about 702, he was ordained priest.

He also wrote his first books in 701. He continued to write the rest of his life, completing some 60 sets of works. Bede was a teacher as well as a writer.

Except for a few visits to various other monasteries, Bede spent his life in prayer, observing the monastic discipline and study of the scriptures. He was considered as one the most learned men of his time and wrote excellent biblical and historical books.

Bede died on Thursday 26 May 735.

He wrote a five line poem that became known as Bede's Death Song:

The translation reads something along the following lines:

"Before setting forth on that inevitable journey, none is wiser than the man who considers- before his soul departs hence- what good or evil he has done, and what judgement his soul will receive after its passing."

Bede was a man of God who had many skills. Many historians consider Bede to be the greatest scholar of all time. He was an historian, a scientist and a teacher. He lived a simple but productive life. One of his major achievements was his ability to learn Latin. This gave him the tools to translate and comment on books of the Bible. His writings have also helped us to better understand the history of Christianity, the Middle Ages and the English People.

His most valued work is a book entitled *Historica Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. This is a detailed description of English history from a Christian point of view.

Without Bede, much history of the English People and Church would have been lost. It for this reason that he has been given the title of venerable and his Saint's Day is celebrated on the 27th of May. Bede was also a humanitarian, respected by his fellow students and monks.

He was a man of God.

Let us pray:

O Lord Jesus Christ, who didst grant to the Venerable Bede thy confessor to drink of the sweetness of thy word; grant that we may also seek unto thee, the Fountain of wisdom, and at length may stand before thy face for ever. Who livest and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Grant, O Lord, we beseech thee, that as the Venerable Bede, living his whole life in retirement from the world, never ceased his diligence in prayer and study; so we, laying aside all discontent and idleness, may cheerfully perform the work which thou givest us to do. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Amen.