

## THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMAGE

For those who were unable to join our Devotional Pilgrimage to Canterbury on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> May we wanted to share our most wonderful unique day with you so that you too could be part of it.

Our Pilgrimage started with prayers at St George's as we all travelled together by coach to Canterbury. During the journey Fiona explained the significance of Canterbury to Christianity from Pope Gregory's mission to convert the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England and its founding in 597 AD by St Augustine to becoming the principal seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Worldwide Anglican Communion .

Father Henry then explained the rise of Thomas Becket from a clerk in the household of Theobald de Bec to his appointment as Chancellor and then to becoming Archbishop of Canterbury . A long-standing dispute with Henry II led to his murder by four of Henry's knights 1170. This violent shocking act sent ripples throughout the Christian world and just 3 years after this death he was canonised as St Thomas of Canterbury. This elevated Canterbury to one of the most important medieval shrines in Christendom . Pilgrimages to the tomb of Becket brought great prosperity to the city and the income paid for the subsequent rebuilding of the Cathedral .

After a short walk from the coach, we arrived at the Cathedral and Fiona led the guided tour explaining some of the most important features of the Cathedral, pausing at each stage for a devotional prayer and reading. We learnt of its Perpendicular Gothic style of architecture , we admired the vaulted ceiling of the Bell Harry Tower and appreciated the magnificence of the stained glass windows . The oldest glass dates back to 12<sup>th</sup> Century and depicts the genealogies of the biblical families ; we examined one of the typological windows showing scenes from the Old Testament and their adjacent equivalent in the New Testament and greatly enjoyed the colours of the Christopher Whall stained glass (representing the Arts & Crafts Movement.)

We visited the place of St Thomas' death which is marked by a stone bearing his name and a dramatic sculpture of 2 pointed swords with their shadows. It was here that Archbishop Runcie and Pope John Paul II knelt in prayer together in 1982.

Our Pilgrimage concluded in the Jesus Chapel in the Crypt, reserved for our visit, with readings from the Letter to the Hebrews , prayers that we may follow the example of St Thomas and the Te Deum.

After a pot of tea and cake we attended Evensong sung by the boy choristers before heading home.

It was an inspiring and memorable visit providing fellowship and spiritual guidance set in a place of true significance and the sun shone all day too !

Canterbury Pilgrims , May 2024