

Readings: *Romans 8: 26 – 30; Psalm 130 (129); Matthew 5: 1 – 12.*

Edward was born about AD 1003, a younger son of King Ethelred (nicknamed ‘the Unready’) and his wife Emma, daughter of Duke Richard of Normandy. After the Danish prince Canute conquered and became king of England in 1016, Edward went into exile, mostly in Normandy, for the next twenty-five years. When Canute’s son Harthacnute died in 1042, Edward was acclaimed as king and crowned in Winchester, the capital of the later Saxon kings.

During most of his reign he had to share power with the powerful earls. In 1045 he married Edith, a daughter of the most powerful of them, Earl Godwin of Wessex, but the marriage was childless. From the mid-1050’s the Godwinson family became increasingly powerful, and Edward seems to have begun his withdrawal from active political life.

One of his major projects was the refounding of the abbey of St Peter in what is now Westminster, and the building of the church as the royal burial place. This, the first building in Norman style in England, was consecrated on 28th December 1065, shortly before Edward’s death on 5th January 1066. He was buried in the abbey church. His death precipitated a three- or four-pronged struggle for the English crown, which was won by Duke William of Normandy, whose coronation set a precedent making Westminster Abbey the coronation church, rather than the royal burial place.

In 1161 the Pope canonized Edward, who has since been called ‘The Confessor’ – that is a saint who, though not a martyr, *confessed* the lordship of Christ by his way of life – and in 1163 his body was translated to a shrine in the abbey. From that time Edward may be regarded as one of the patron saints of England – the other being the martyred king Edmund of East Anglia.

King Henry III, who became king, aged nine, in 1216, was devoted to his predecessor, and in 1245 began the replacement of Edward’s church by the present building, intended for his own burial.

On the 106th anniversary of Edward’s translation – 13th October 1269 – his body was again translated to the site behind the high altar, where it has remained to this day – surviving the desecration of almost all the other shrines in England.

Saint Edward the Confessor lies at the heart of English religious life, his shrine increasingly a goal of pilgrimage and a place of prayer, and his feast observed on this day.