

Suggested Readings: 2 Timothy 2:22 – 26; Ps. 36(37) 3 – 6, 30 & 31; John 17:20 – 26. *WM June 28th*

In AD 664 a Synod, held at the place we now call Whitby, decided that in future the whole Church in England would keep Easter according to the Roman, rather than the Celtic, way of calculation. This decision led to some of the Irish monks to return home. On 14th July in that same year the sixth Archbishop of Canterbury, Deusdedit, died after an episcopate of some nine years. The see was left vacant for some time – perhaps because the king of Kent died in the same year. Then the new king, Egbert, in consultation with Oswy, the king of Northumbria, sent a priest called Wighard to Rome *‘with the request that he be consecrated Archbishop of the Church of the English’*.

Unfortunately, plague broke out in Rome and Wighard, together with most of his companions died. It fell to Pope Vitalian to find a suitable replacement. His choice fell on Theodore, a sixty-five-year-old Greek-speaking monk, born, like Saint Paul, in Tarsus, in what is now Turkey. With him the Pope sent another monk, Adrian, born in North Africa, who had already travelled in Gaul, and so could help Theodore on his journey. It took them a year to reach Canterbury, and Theodore took possession of the archbishopric on 27th May 669.

Accompanied by Adrian, he set out to visit as many of the churches as possible, including Lindisfarne, filling vacant bishoprics, and trying to settle a dispute over the see of York. In 672 he held at Hatfield the first national synod of the Anglo-Saxon Church, with the aims of uniting the separate, and sometimes rival, local churches, and bringing the life and teaching of the English Church into conformity with the rest of the Christendom. A second synod in 679 concentrated on doctrinal orthodoxy. He died, after twenty-one years as archbishop, on this date in 690. Bede wrote: *‘The English churches prospered more during (his) pontificate than they ever did before’*.

From the ministry of Theodore English Christians in particular may draw a twofold lesson.

First there is his labour to unite in a single Church all who followed Christ throughout what would (after 250 years) become the kingdom of England. But alongside this we must recognize his concern for unity between the English Church and the rest of Christendom, through the see of Rome, which had sent this elderly foreigner, who was to bring into being a Church which was at the same time English and part of the then undivided Catholic Communion.