

(1110) SAINT JUSTUS (1<sup>st</sup> Bishop of Rochester)

(NOVEMBER 10<sup>TH</sup>, 2020)

Justus was one of the second group of missionaries sent to assist Augustine in the English Mission by Pope Gregory in AD 601. According to Bede this group brought with them a number of books: One of these may be the *Canterbury Gospels*, now preserved at Corpus Christ College in Cambridge, and used at the installation of each Archbishop of Canterbury.

Shortly before his death Augustine consecrated three of his companions as bishops: Laurence to succeed him as archbishop, Mellitus as bishop for the East Saxons, with his see in London, and Justus as bishop for a sub-kingdom of (western) Kent, with his see in Rochester, an important town where Watling Street crosses the River Medway.

Augustine had dedicated his cathedral to Christ, and had founded the monastery of Saints Peter & Paul in Canterbury. The cathedral church in Rochester was dedicated to Saint Andrew – patron of the monastery in Rome from which Augustine had been sent to England – and this remained the dedication until the destruction of the monastery under Henry VIII. The Rochester diocesan coat of arms is still a cross-saltire – the cross of Saint Andrew.

When King Ethelbert, Augustine's patron and protector, died in 616 his son in Kent and his great-nephews in Essex were pagans and hostile to the Christians. The three bishops decided to escape to Gaul: Justus and Mellitus did so, but – so Bede tells us – before Laurence could follow, Saint Peter appeared to him and scourged him so fiercely that, when Eadbald, the new king of Kent, was shown the scars, he renounced paganism and accepted the Christian faith.

Justus was able to return to his diocese of Rochester, but, because of continuing pagan opposition, Mellitus was never able to return to London. He remained in Canterbury, where, on the death of Laurence in 619, he became archbishop. On his death in 624, he was succeeded as fourth archbishop by Justus, who served in that office for only three years. During that time, however, he took the important step of consecrating Paulinus, another of Augustine's companions, and sending him to the kingdom of Northumbria [see *October 10<sup>th</sup>*].

When he died on 10<sup>th</sup> November 627 Justus, like all three of his predecessors, was buried in the Abbey of Saint Peter & Saint Paul – later renamed Saint Augustine's – where the site of his burial is now marked by a stone. His feast is observed with Saint Mellitus on 24<sup>th</sup> April.