

Readings for Today: 1 Corinthians 9: 16 – 19; Psalm 47; John 13: 16 – 20.

Aidan was a monk in the community founded by Saint Columba on the Scottish Island of Iona. In that community the Northumbrian prince Oswald (whose feast we observed on 5th August) took refuge when he was driven into exile. There he became a Christian. In AD 633 Oswald was able to return to Northumbria, and in the following year he took control of the kingdom. One of his first acts was to ask the Iona community to *“send him a bishop by whose teaching and ministry the English people might receive the blessings of the Christian faith and the sacraments”* (Bede).

The first monk sent soon returned to Iona, saying that the people were unteachable. Then the Iona community sent Aidan “a man of outstanding gentleness, holiness and moderation”, who was consecrated as bishop, with his episcopal seat on the Island of Lindisfarne (now called Holy Island) off the Northumbrian coast, north of the royal capital of Bamburgh. On the island Aidan set up a monastic community, which lasted until it was destroyed by Viking invaders in AD 793, and became the centre from which the Christian faith was spread throughout northern England.

Aidan was, therefore, as important a missionary leader in the north as Augustine in the south. It took Aidan some time to master the English language, and until he did it was King Oswald’s habit to assist in the conversion of his people by interpreting Aidan’s teaching to them.

Bede tells us that Aidan *“never sought or cared for any worldly possessions and loved to give away to the poor who chanced to meet him whatever he received from kings or wealthy folk...whatever people he met on his walks...he stopped and spoke to them. If they were heathen, he urged them to be baptized; and if they were Christians, he strengthened their faith, and inspired them by word and deed to live a good life and be generous to others.”*

One of Aidan’s methods of spreading the faith was to buy English slave boys and educate them to become leaders in the Church: among this group were Chad, who later became the first bishop of Lichfield, and his brother Cedd, later bishop for the East Saxons.

After the Norman Conquest a new monastery was built on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, of which the ruins still remain. The Island is again a place of pilgrimage. [Picture in *Wikipedia*]