

## ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

### 'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

17th March 2021

Today is St Patrick's Day but, rather than write about him, I've chosen to think about one of the great northern saints, St Cuthbert, who is remembered by the Church on 20th March. Cuthbert was born in the Scottish lowlands, which were then part of the Northumbrian kingdom, in the early seventh century, so about 250 years after Patrick. We learn of his life from the Venerable Bede, the great ecclesiastical historian of the early eighth century, who, like St Cuthbert, is buried in Durham Cathedral.



Cuthbert had a vision of St Aidan, who had founded the monastery on Lindisfarne, being taken up to heaven. As a result, he renounced everything and became a monk, initially at Melrose and then later at Lindisfarne where he became Prior. He was a man of prayer living a life of simplicity and holiness, a teacher and preacher. Bede records that 'he taught others only what he first practised himself'. His charm and practical abilities drew people to him.



When the community on Lindisfarne was driven out by Viking raiders, they took with them their two most precious things - St Cuthbert's relics and the Lindisfarne Gospels. After much wandering the community ended up in Durham. There is a beautiful modern bronze sculpture by Fenwick Lawson in Durham of the monks carrying their beloved Cuthbert which in its ruggedness expresses the struggle of their journey.

Cuthbert's reverence for life and his intimacy with nature makes him particularly attractive to us today. The Eider Ducks are popularly known as 'Cuddy's Ducks' because he protected them. One of the best known stories about Cuthbert is of him going out in night to pray. He was followed by another monk who wondered what he was up to. After standing in icy water for some hours praying and singing psalms, when he emerged from the water at dawn, the other monk saw two otters which rubbed against Cuthbert and breathed on his feet to warm him up. This story, like many others of saints and animals, is an example of the tradition that Cuthbert's harmony with nature reflected his closeness to the Creator. Perhaps as we think about St Cuthbert we might reflect on the way that we seem so often to have become detached from the natural world and the environmental and ecological challenges which have ensued and ponder how on an individual level we might recapture some of the harmony.

Cuthbert also needed 'time out' in solitude with God in order to survive the busyness and activity of his ministry. He regularly withdrew initially to what is now known as St Cuthbert's Island close to Lindisfarne and later to the Inner Farne where he eventually lived as a hermit until his death in 687. The simplicity of his shrine in Durham Cathedral reflects the simplicity of his life. The former Dean of Durham, Michael Sadgrove, wrote 'it is as if the shrine is a kind of Inner Farne within the Cathedral, a constant and necessary reminder of where our true and ultimate accountability lies'. I wonder where each of us might find our own 'Inner Farne'.



With love and prayers

Camilla

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