

Augustine 26 May
First Archbishop of Canterbury, 605 — Memorial

Today we remember Augustine, the first archbishop of Canterbury. He enters history in the year 596, when he was deputy-abbot of a monastery in the city of Rome. He would have been quite happy to remain in that position, but Pope Gregory the Great chose him to lead a mission to the Anglo-Saxons of England. Augustine was to convert them to Christianity and to organize an English Church.

With a company of thirty or forty monks, Augustine landed on the coast of Kent in the spring of 597. The local king had married a Christian wife from France, and she convinced him to let the missionaries enter Canterbury and occupy a small, dilapidated church, abandoned by British Christians when they fled from the invading Anglo-Saxons. The pagan king also permitted the Roman missionaries to preach the gospel without hindrance.

Augustine was a reluctant missionary. Instead of actively proclaiming the gospel, he and his companions tried to become a normal part of the landscape, performing the liturgy and making processions much as if they were still in Rome. Those Anglo-Saxons who wished to join them were welcome, but the monks did not go looking for converts. This strategy worked — within four years the king of Kent and his chief retainers accepted baptism. Augustine was made an archbishop by the Pope and by the time he died, on May twenty-sixth in the year 605, the foundations of the English church were truly laid.

See Readings, page 552.

Sentence

I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 2 *Corinthians 12.9b*

Collect

Everliving God,
you strengthened your servant Augustine,
though he was fearful and laden with doubt,
to lay the foundations of your Church
among the English people.

Grant us always to show forth the reason
for all your gifts so freely bestowed upon us,
by sharing with all peoples and races
your infinite gift of salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Readings

2 *Corinthians 10.7-18* Psalm 66.1-8

Refrain The Lord holds our souls in life.
Matthew 13.31-33

Prayer over the Gifts

Lord God,
who gave to your servant Augustine
a heart to persevere in obedience,
grant that as we gather at this table,
we may find our shelter and strength
under the boughs of the tree of life.

We ask this in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Preface of Pentecost

Prayer after Communion

O God,
the only strength of your servant Augustine,
guide us through all our tribulations,
that we may never doubt your loving purpose
nor ever withhold our hands from your service.
We ask this through Jesus Christ the Lord.