

Grapevine Integrated Prayer Diary Notes September

The Byzantine Church year begins with September (as, coincidentally, the Roman financial year did), and it seems that in England in the tenth and early eleventh centuries the year was counted from the date the Venerable Bede reckoned for the autumnal equinox, 24 September. Bede writes about four of the saints commemorated this month in his *History of the English Church and People*: Gregory, Birinus, Ninian, and Theodore. We also recall, with Holy Cross Day and Michaelmas, that not only holy men and women are commemorated. In the second half of this month, we encounter striking examples of some of the complexities and uncertainties of the study of the lives of saints.

1: Giles (in Latin, Aegidius) was a hermit who founded a monastery at a place in Provence later called Saint-Gilles. It was on the routes for pilgrims to both Compostella and the Holy Land and he became so popular (with the help of a late, unreliable *Life* of him) that Provence was called 'the Province of St. Giles'. He is also one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, to whom at least 24 hospitals were dedicated in England in the Middle Ages, as his *Life* told of him being shot in place of a hind which sought refuge with him from hunters. As patron of blacksmiths, his churches are often found at road junctions, which travelers could visit while their horses were being shod at nearby smithies.

Also, Drithelm (c. 700), who was ill, died, so far as anyone could tell – but hours later, clearly lived again. He went to the village church and prayed through the night. In the morning, he divided his wealth in thirds, one third each for his wife, their sons, and the poor. He had had a detailed vision of the next life, including Heaven – which he was not allowed to enter. He lived for the rest of his life as a Benedictine monk at Melrose Abbey, often reciting Psalms while standing in the cold, or even icy, waters of the Tweed. He told his experiences to his king, Aldfrith of Northumbria, and to St. Ethilwald (740: 12 Feb., translation 21 Apr.), and his Vision is recorded in the Venerable Bede's (735:25/26/27 May) *History*. Dr. Farmer calls it 'the first example of this kind of literature from England' and 'a remote precursor of Dante'.

3: Gregory the Great (604), from being chief civil magistrate of Rome, became a monk there, but was called upon to be one of Rome's seven deacons and then papal ambassador to Constantinople. Thereafter, he hoped to become a missionary to the Anglo-Saxons in Britain, but was elected Pope instead, after which he sent St. Augustine and 40 monks from his own monastery to Britain in his place. He was an author – of the first *Life* of St. Benedict, and the *Pastoral Care* (on the office and duties of bishops: translated into Old English by King Alfred), among other works –and the term "Gregorian Chant" recalls his contribution to codifying and adapting Church music. Coining the description 'servant of the servants of God', he spent the income from Church properties to relieve sufferers from war, famine, and pestilence, and to ransom prisoners, and negotiated peace treaties with the invading Lombards.

4: Birinus (650), possibly a Lombard by birth, was sent to continue the evangelization of Britain, becoming the apostle of Wessex – baptizing King Cynegils, whose daughter married St. Oswald – and receiving Dorchester on Thames for his see, and later dedicating a church at Winchester, which not so long after his death became a separate diocese.

7: Evurtius (4th c.), bishop of Orleans, already commemorated in the York Breviary, was added to the *Book of Common Prayer* calendar in 1604, when the form of his name given was 'Enurchus': yet another form is 'Evortius'. Alban Butler said, 'His name is famous in the ancient western Martyrologies, but his history is of no authority'. D.H. Farmer thinks he 'might possibly be identified

with an Eortius who took part in the council of Valencia (374)' – and that it is more than a coincidence that this is also the birthday of Queen Elizabeth I.

8: Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. While most saints are commemorated on the day of their death as 'birthday into Heaven', often with later 'translations' of their bodies or relics further commemorated – 3 and 4 September are in fact such translations of St. Gregory and St. Birinus – the Nativities of some few saints hallowed before their birth, such as the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist, are also celebrated.

9: Peter Claver (1654) after studying at Barcelona university, became a Jesuit and in 1610 went to the New World as a missionary, to Cartagena – one of the principal centres of the African slave trade. Here, he joined Fr. Alfonso de Sandoval, who was already ministering to the slaves. They met them on arrival with food and medicine and various treats, and interpreters and illustrated books to bring them the Good News and prepare any so moved for baptism – with St. Peter meanwhile learning the most frequently encountered of their languages. He did what he could to keep in touch when they were put to work in mines and on plantations, with annual spring visits – from 1616 on as a priest, who added to his religious vows a personal one to be 'Aethiopum semper servus' ('servant/slave to the Africans forever'). His care also extended to prisoners in the city jails (including prisoners of the Inquisition), and the sick in the city hospitals, and seamen and traders, for whom he held an annual autumn mission, as well as Muslim, and English, and Dutch visitors (and prisoners of war). He spent his last four years partially paralyzed and in constant pain, and, sadly, neglected by the young African servant assigned to help him – to all of which his response was, 'My sins deserve more punishment than this.'

13 (in the West): John Chrysostom's great preaching earned him that nickname, 'Golden Mouth', while still a priest in Antioch. Soon elected Archbishop of Constantinople (398), he spent his household money on the poor and hospitals, but his drive for moral reform of the court, clergy, and people met with resistance, with the Empress and various bishops conspiring to 'depose' him, unheard, on false charges. Recalled from banishment, he resumed his plain speaking, and was banished again, though both the people of his diocese and the pope and other western bishops supported him: he died of exhaustion, being forced to travel by foot in bad weather to a place of 'higher security' (407). John Henry Newman praised 'his intimate sympathy and compassionateness for the whole world, not only in its strength but in its weakness'.

Also, Notburga (1313), who, working as kitchen-maid to Count Henry of Rattenburg, gave leftovers to the poor instead of, as ordered, to the pigs – and was fired for it. Finding work with a farmer in Eben, she saved some of her own share of food, in order to give it to the poor. She is buried there at the chapel of St. Rupert (718: 24 Sept.), first Bishop of Salzburg and Apostle of Bavaria and Carinthia.

14: D.H. Farmer notes that dedications to "St. Cross" are in fact "to Christ in the Cross": this Feast, coinciding with dedications in 335 of Churches on the sites of the Holy Sepulchre and Calvary, particularly commemorates the Exaltation of the Cross upon the recovery of a major relic of it from the Persians who had stolen it during their conquest and its restoration to Jerusalem (629) by the Emperor Heraclius.

16: Cyprian (258), a barrister who became a Christian at 46, was elected Bishop of Carthage two years later. He went underground successfully during the persecution by the Emperor Decius. Together with Pope Cornelius (253), who died under renewed persecution and who shares this feast (*BCP* 26 Sept.),

he contended that those who had apostatized under persecution could be forgiven and readmitted to the Church after suitable penance. But he upheld the African practice of re-baptizing those who had been baptized by schismatics, heretics, and apostates, against the Roman practice defended by Pope Stephen, and later generally accepted, of recognizing such baptisms if properly performed in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. St. Cyprian was caught under the persecution of the Emperor Valerian and beheaded when he would not make idolatrous sacrifice.

Also today, St. Ninian (5th century), a Celtic bishop described by Bede (our principle source about him) as apostle of the Southern Picts.

17: Lambert (c. 705), as Bishop of Maastricht, exiled and restored amidst Frankish power struggles, was a missionary in the Kemperland and Brabant for some 30 years, a labour paralleled for much of that time by St. Willibrord and his English missionaries further north. He was murdered in Luik/Liège by nobles who stole Church property and terrorized the clergy (among others). Buried in Maastricht, his body was translated by his successor, St. Hubert, to Luik which soon grew from hamlet to central city of the diocese.

Also today, St. Hildegard of Bingen (1179), Benedictine visionary, natural scientist, composer and playwright, who corresponded at length with St. Bernard, four popes, two emperors, and Henry II of England, among others.

19: Theodore of Tarsus (690), educated at Athens, was introduced to Pope Vitelian by St. Adrian (710: 9 Jan.), an African abbot who had refused his invitation to become Archbishop of Canterbury, recommending St. Theodore instead, whom he then willingly accompanied there. At the time, St. Theodore was a monk in his sixties, and not ordained. He made a visitation of most of the country, held the first synods of the English Church, and created many new sees in a framework which Attwater says "is still the basis of the diocesan system of the Church of England." He made St. Adrian abbot of St. Augustine's, Canterbury, where they set up a very successful school with Greek, Roman Law, computistics, music, and Biblical exegesis in the tradition of Antioch, among its subjects.

20 (2 Nov. in the East): Eustace, a martyr widely revered in East and West (where he is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers), of uncertain date (and, some say, uncertain existence: e.g., Dr. Farmer, 'quite probably of no historical existence', Attwater, 'it is probable [...] a wholly fictitious character'), of late and unreliable legend (Dr. Farmer, 'historically worthless', F. Mershman, 'certainly fabulous'), including, like that of St. Hubert (727: 30 May, translation 3 Nov.), conversion upon encountering a stag with a luminous crucifix between its antlers. The island of Sint Eustatius is named after him. A 12th-century reliquary in the shape of his head escaped the 16th-century iconoclasts at Basel cathedral, but not the plundering army of Napoleon: returned, it was sold in 1836 and ended up in the British Museum in 1850, where, during a cleaning 106 years later, it was discovered still to contain relics – which were returned to Basel.

21: Matthew (16 Nov. in the East), a publican (that is, a Jewish farmer of taxes for the Roman government) called Levi in the Gospels of Sts. Mark (2:14, who adds "son of Alphaeus") and Luke (5:27-29) and Matthew in what is identified as his own Gospel (9:9) – and in the lists of the Twelve Disciples in all the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. He immediately left all to follow Jesus when He called him. St. Irenaeus says he addressed his Gospel particularly to his fellow Jews, and Papias (c. 130 AD) that he originally did so 'in the Hebrew language' (which may here mean, Aramaic). Various

traditions report that he was later martyred, but give a variety of places, including Persia and Ethiopia.

22 (27 Dec. in the East, 9 Sept. among the Copts): Maurice and companions, martyrs (late 3rd c.), principal officer and members of a Legion 'called Theban', were Christians who refused orders of the pagan Emperor Maximian to kill innocent fellow-Christian citizens during a campaign in Switzerland, and submitted instead to being killed themselves at Agaunum (now Saint-Maurice-en-Valais). The earliest known account, by St. Eucherius of Lyons (c. 450: 16 Nov.), looks to the revelation of their bodies to Bishop Theodore of Octodurum a century after their death. (The historicity of its details has been the subject of wide study and dispute since the Reformation.) King Sigismund of Burgundy renewed the monastery there in 515, and St. Maurice came to be the patron of the Holy Roman Emperors, with a sword and spurs taken to be his used in coronation ceremonies until 1916. With an eye to his Theban origin (and perhaps his name: cf. Maurus, 'Moor'), he was widely (though not exclusively) depicted as a black African since at least the 13th century, when a statue of him as African knight (*miles*) in armour was placed in his Cathedral in Magdeburg by the tomb of Emperor Otto I. Henri Leclercq notes that the Abbey of Agaunum became further famous by the introduction into the West around 520 of 'Perpetual Psalmody, or *laus perennis*, [...] carried on, day and night, by several choirs, or *turmae*, who succeeded each other in the recitation of the Divine Office, so that prayer went on without cessation.'

23 (24 in the East): Thecla, 'the most famous of virgin martyrs' in the words of M.R. James, got to be so on account of the apocryphal *Acts of Paul* (written c. 160-80), which he thinks 'may have used a local legend [...] of a real Christian martyr Thecla' (while Dr. Farmer thinks it 'likely [...] Thecla had no historical existence apart from the preposterous Acts'). These Acts are full of curious details, such as St. Thecla baptizing herself, escaping dressed like a man, and being commissioned by St. Paul, 'Go, and teach the word of God.' In the East, she is called 'Protomartyr among women and equal to the Apostles'. St. Gregory Nazianzen (389: 2 Jan., 9 May, translation 11 June; 25 & 30 Jan. in the East) lived for 3 years by her cave-tomb in Seleucia (modern Silifke). In 2010, in her catacomb in Rome, a wall-painting which may be the earliest known depiction of St. Paul (vividly described in these Acts) was discovered.

29: Michael appears in *Daniel*, *Jude*, and *Revelation*, and is commemorated on this day (often together with "all Angels") because his basilica on the Salaria Way near Rome was dedicated on it.

30: Jerome (420), born in Dalmatia (now Croatia), educated at Rome, was in Trier when he decided to become a monk, and spent some years among hermits in the desert near Antioch (where he learnt Hebrew from a rabbi), before going to study in Constantinople. Returning to Rome, he became secretary to Pope St. Damasus (384: 11 Dec.), who asked him to revise the Latin translation of the New Testament – the beginning of a life's work on an updated translation of the whole Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, the universal language of the West. While in Rome, he became friend and guide to a group of dedicated Christian women, a number of whom followed him when he went to Bethlehem, where one of them, St. Paula (404; 26 Jan.) paid for convents for men and women, a hospice for travelers, and a free school where St. Jerome taught Latin and Greek to the local children.

David Llewellyn Dodds