

Saturday 12 October 2024

St Wilfrid of Ripon



Wilfrid (or 'Wilfrith') was born of a noble family in Northumbria in about the year 633. He was educated at Lindisfarne monastery but disliked their Celtic 'insularity'. He went to Canterbury then Rome. He spent three years at Lyons where he became a monk.

He was appointed Abbot of Ripon and took with him the Roman monastic system and Benedictine Rule, which he immediately introduced.

At the Synod of Whitby, his dominance was largely responsible for the victory of the Roman party over the Celts and, on being elected Bishop of York, went to Compiègne to be consecrated by twelve Frankish bishops rather than risk any doubt of schism by being ordained by Celtic bishops. His tenure was characterised by narrow-minded disputes. He resigned the see of York after further arguments to become Bishop of Hexham, and spent his remaining years in the monastery at Ripon.

Wilfrid was more responsible than almost anyone for the Church in England leaving its Celtic roots and joining the Roman Catholic Church, though his manner and methods did not help him draw people close to him at a personal level.

He died on this day at Ripon in the year 709.

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Prayers of intercession © *My Redeemer Lives* 1 2.

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The Collect for St Wilfrid

Almighty God,
who called our forebears to the light of the gospel
by the preaching of your servant Wilfrid:
help us, who keep his life and labour in remembrance,
to glorify your name by following the example
of his zeal and perseverance;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.' Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices, together they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. *Isaiah 52: 7-10*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. *1 Corinthians 1:18-25*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke

All Glory to you O Lord.

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years. Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. *Luke 1:5-11*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Meditation on the reading from 1 Corinthians 1.

Love isn't logical. We don't love people because they deserve it or because they are objectively better, kinder, more beautiful or more intelligent than everyone else. We just love them. They may behave badly, annoy us or pester us to death, but if the love we feel for them is real, it persists in spite of that.

I think this is what St Paul means by ‘the foolishness of the cross’. Let me explain. Jesus had great power. He was able to heal the sick, raise the dead, feed the five thousand and calm a storm at sea. But when he was offered earthly power by the devil in the wilderness, and when he was tempted to run away in the Garden of Gethsemane, he chose to suffer for the sake of love rather than use his power and save himself. When he was dying on the cross, those who didn’t understand taunted him, ‘He saved others, why doesn’t he save himself?’ His death on the cross seemed foolish, irrational. Why would a god let himself be tortured and killed like that? Especially for people who weren’t particularly good or kind or holy or important in a worldly sense.

The message of the cross is a paradox. Real power is about renouncing earthly power for the sake of love. The cross shows us what that costs in this life; but the resurrection shows us its true value in the spiritual realm.

The Old Testament often portrays a God who has no empathy for the weakness of his creation. Think of the story of Uzzah, who was struck dead simply for touching the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:1–17). Think of the ethnic cleansing in the book of Joshua, where the original inhabitants of Canaan are destroyed down to the last woman, child, and animal because they’re not ‘the chosen people’ and have been brought up to worship different gods. It’s horrible and I don’t believe it was ever what God wanted.

Jesus came to earth as a human being to show that, on the contrary, God *can* empathise with us. As St Paul says in his letter to the Hebrews: ‘we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin’. (Hebrews 4:15 NIV). Jesus didn’t come to show us how to live with great power and authority. He didn’t come just to lord it over us like an earthly king. He came to show us how we, as ordinary people in ordinary walks of life, can live in harmony with the Holy Spirit and participate in the loving, healing nature of God.

Living like that isn’t easy: like Jesus, we will take a lot of flak for acting with integrity, for standing up for those who are less fortunate, and for insisting on the ways of peace and love when the mob is calling for aggression and exclusion. We’ve seen how those who take the knee for Black Lives Matter have been trolled. We’ve seen how even the Lifeboat Service has been attacked for rescuing refugees at sea. We’ve seen how young people protesting about the policies causing climate change have been told to shut up and get back in their classrooms. I’m sure you can think of countless other examples.

The Way of the Cross is hard. Do you remember the hymn, 'I have decided to follow Jesus'? It includes the telling line, 'Though none go with me, still I will follow'. 'No turning back, no turning back'.

To many people this seems like foolishness. 'Why go to all that trouble? Why put yourself through it?' The answer: because 'love is as strong as death ... It burns like a mighty flame ... If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned' (Song of Songs 8:6-7).

Do we live as if we believe that? Do we understand the real power that is 'the foolishness of the cross'? Will we choose to live in love even when it costs us dearly? I pray that we will.

Prayers of intercession

O God,
we trust in Your power,
even as it is often found in weakness;
in Your wisdom,
even as it is expressed in seeming foolishness;
in Your wholeness,
even as it comes to us amid brokenness.

We do not ask this day for dazzling displays of strength,
electric exercises of intellectual prowess,
or marvellous manifestations of miracles.
our body, Your children, Your church.
For this Temple of Your Spirit
is built not upon our own abilities, knowledge, or restorative skill,
but upon You, in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
 for the sake of your Son,**

**our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**