



Augustine of Canterbury

(born first third of the 6th century – died probably 26 May 604)

Feast Day: May 27th

Augustine of Canterbury was a Benedictine monk who became the first Archbishop of Canterbury in the year 597. He is considered the "Apostle to the English" and a founder of the English Church.

Augustine was the prior of a monastery in Rome when Pope Gregory the Great chose him in 595 to lead a mission, usually known as the Gregorian mission, to Britain to Christianize King Æthelberht and his Kingdom of Kent from Anglo-Saxon paganism. Kent was probably chosen because Æthelberht had married a Christian princess, Bertha, daughter of Charibert I the King of Paris, who was expected to exert some influence over her husband. Before reaching Kent, the missionaries had considered turning back, but Gregory urged them on, and in 597, Augustine landed on the Isle of Thanet and proceeded to Æthelberht's main town of Canterbury.

King Æthelberht converted to Christianity and allowed the missionaries to preach freely, giving them land to found a monastery outside the city walls. Augustine was consecrated as a bishop and converted many of the king's subjects, including thousands during a mass baptism on Christmas Day in 597.

Pope Gregory sent more missionaries in 601, along with encouraging letters and gifts for the churches, although attempts to persuade the native British bishops to submit to Augustine's authority failed. Roman bishops were established at London, and Rochester in 604, and a school was founded to train Anglo-Saxon priests and missionaries. Augustine also arranged the consecration of his successor, Laurence of Canterbury. The archbishop probably died in 604 and was soon revered as a saint.

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