

AN INTERVIEW WITH ST. AIDAN

All Saints Day 2013

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St. Aidan it is wonderful to meet you, but well you aren't quite what I expected?

What did you expect wings, flowing white garb, maybe a halo. No I'll leave those depictions to those artist types. You see me as I was during my ministry here. Simple traveling garb and my staff for walking for that is how I started my ministry, walking to Lindisfarne on foot with my fellow brothers. I continued to travel on foot because that is how I came to encounter people.

Speaking of traveling on foot Father Aidan, did it occur to you that giving that horse away deprived you of a way to reach and save more souls.

Well yes that is a famous story. King Oswald did give me a fine horse and saddle but I was no more than a mile outside of the castle when I saw this man who desperately needed a horse. The horse would make his life so much easier so yes I gave it to him and yes Oswald was upset with me. What you and Oswald did not understand is that in working among the poor they tended to flee from those on horse back since they often received rough treatment by them.

No I was content to walk, which gave me the chance to talk to people on the road. Even as I made my initial journey from Iona I began to meet people and tell them of our mission. Often I, or one of my brothers, would join a group traveling on foot and take the opportunity to do some evangelism. By that I mean sharing the good news about Christ for that's what evangelism is. You folks seem to think it's about getting people into your church which is a byproduct but it really means to show people who and what Jesus was about.

So what is it like being a saint?

Well I never really thought about being a saint and I suspect my brothers would wonder about the title. Being a saint is about being faithful and true to Christ. This does not mean that I am perfect, far from it as again my brothers would probably be quick to tell you. I suffer the same frustrations, pains and disappointments as anyone else. I also celebrate all the joys.

The point is that this was not about my ministry all by myself. This is about the ministry of so many "saints" if you will. I was surrounded by saints in action if not in name and that's what made my ministry so effective. It was not about me and that may be one of the key things about being a saint.

So tell me about your ministry while you were there.

In some respects my ministry was very much the same as Paul wrote in first Corinthians. I planted but others watered and it was the Spirit that really provided the growth.

I was sent by King Oswald to the northeast when he wanted to spread the gospel to his kingdom. Bishop Corman had first gone out but returned very quickly saying these people were too violent and too uneducated to be taught the gospel.

This truly is all about the ministry of the baptized and that is every one of you. You are all ministers and you all have ministries. You may not have discovered them yet, but you do have them and it is time you identified them and got to work.

More than anything else my life was about bringing Christ to the least and the last. Living Jesus' teaching of what you do for the least of these you do for me.

What made you think you could do what your predecessor couldn't?

I prayed about how to truly evangelize these people and realized that God loved each and every person no matter how rich or poor, educated or illiterate. He wanted us to reach out to every person. The only way to do that is to meet them where they were.

This meant that I had to see Christ in every person I met, high or low, rich or poor. This was what I planned to do differently from Bishop Corman. Was I nervous, somewhat but I had already left behind so much just to be at Iona so this was just the next step on the journey. God had been with me so far and I knew he had would lead, all I needed to do was follow.

I took an approach that Patrick and Columba my predecessors had done. I gathered some monks and established an abbey in Lindesfarne that was more than a church. We became the center of the community. We were a marketplace, a hospital as well as a church. We educated the children and from the community raised up more monks and also nuns. These new members would then go out and start other monasteries and convents. As a matter of fact we supplied a number of Abbots and Abbesses for the northern part of England. Each of these became a center of a community and through that center spread the gospel. This became the Celtic way of Evangelism and to be honest with you folks, I think it is the key for your success in the future.

We knew that these poor people needed more than just a religious education. It is tough to focus on God when your stomach is empty or you are ill. Jesus taught, but he also healed and fed. This was the core of my ministry that I planned and that is how my mission spread.

Now that meant that in some respects, my brothers and sisters and I had to be Christ for these people. To make Christ known to them we first had to know Christ and then act as Christ's hands and feet on earth. Words are important, but actions are critical.

What fuels your drive and determination and gives you energy, not in the face of opposition, but in the face of apathy?

By asking that I assume that you folks today face some of the same challenges as I did. As I set about my work with my brothers and sisters some we approached were absolutely hostile to the gospel. Some because they wanted to follow the old gods the old ways others because they were afraid to leave the old ways behind because they thought God or the gods would punish them. Many however were so weighed down by the cares of life they just didn't see the relevance.

Apathy was a major problem in my time and I suspect even with all your modern wonders, apathy is still a problem. How many times did people say they had too many things to do? If you remember Jesus told a parable about people invited to a banquet and everybody was too busy. So the host sent his servants into the street and invited others. There are always others, as Jesus said the harvest is large, but the workers are few. True in his day, true in mine and true in yours.

So how did I keep from getting discouraged? First I celebrated my successes. When something went well I said thank you to God and enjoyed the success instead of letting all the little disappointments crowd in. More than anything else I made sure my brothers and I lived a life that was soaked in prayer. Now as monks prayer was one of the three jobs that we had along with work just to support ourselves and then the teaching that we did. I'm sure some of you will say I don't have time, but if you want to build that relationship with God and Christ you might want to talk to them on a regular basis. What kind of friendship, what kind of relationship is built without frequent communication.

Now I have said more than once, "God what are you doing here?" in a prayer. But that is the point. When you said, God what is going on here, mean it and in fact say it as a prayer. Where are you God, what are you calling me to do are all good questions to take to God in prayer.

More than anything else find the ministries that give you energy rather than ones you do because it seems like the right thing.

What one thing would you suggest to the St Aidanites on Edinburgh Dr if they asked how they might become a better parish for our neighbors, our friends and ourselves.

Just one thing, well that is a challenge. I noticed when I arrived that there is picture hanging in the hallway by the office that quotes John 1:7. The full passage is "He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him." And then I see on your service bulletin that you are now saying you are Christ's beacon to all seeking God. I don't know if you realize this but Aidan means bright flame. So you have the essential idea in that you are called to be the light of the world as Jesus teaches. You need to make your flames shine brightly especially to the world that does not know Christ. Now your world is very unfamiliar to me, but I sense that many of the same problems face you that faced me. There are people who are hungry, sick and most of all discouraged by a harsh life. At their hearts they all seek meaning and purpose. The people of my time didn't even know that such a thing as the church existed and it seems that many in your world do not care or in fact do not like what they think a church is like. There are certainly plenty of people spouting off about Christianity who do not represent it in a very positive light. They show a face of Christ and of God that is filled with anger, fear and well discrimination.

Jesus never said worship me he said follow me and that's what I have done and that's what you have done. Love each other as I have loved you he said that last night before he was arrested. That is how I brought my flame into the world and how you can bring your light into the world. That is how you can be a beacon for all seeking Christ. You have the right idea, you are going in the right direction you just need to keep moving forward.