

CHRISTIAN BEGINNINGS IN JARROW

The first church in Jarrow was Saint Paul's, dedicated in 685AD. It was built on land given by Ecgrith, the Anglo-Saxon King of Northumbria to Saint Benet Biscop. The dedication stone can be still be seen in Saint Paul's. It mentions Ceolfriht the first Abbot, who watched over the young Saint Bede as he grew in wisdom, learning and holiness.

If you are new to Jarrow make sure you visit Saint Paul's; it is an inspiring place that recalls the ancient roots of Christian faith in this part of the world and imbued with the sense of holiness.



Saint Bede (672-735) would go on to become the greatest scholar of his age and his writings are still studied today. Pope Francis, at his election, chose a line written by Bede as his papal motto:

miserando atque eligendo
by having mercy and by choosing

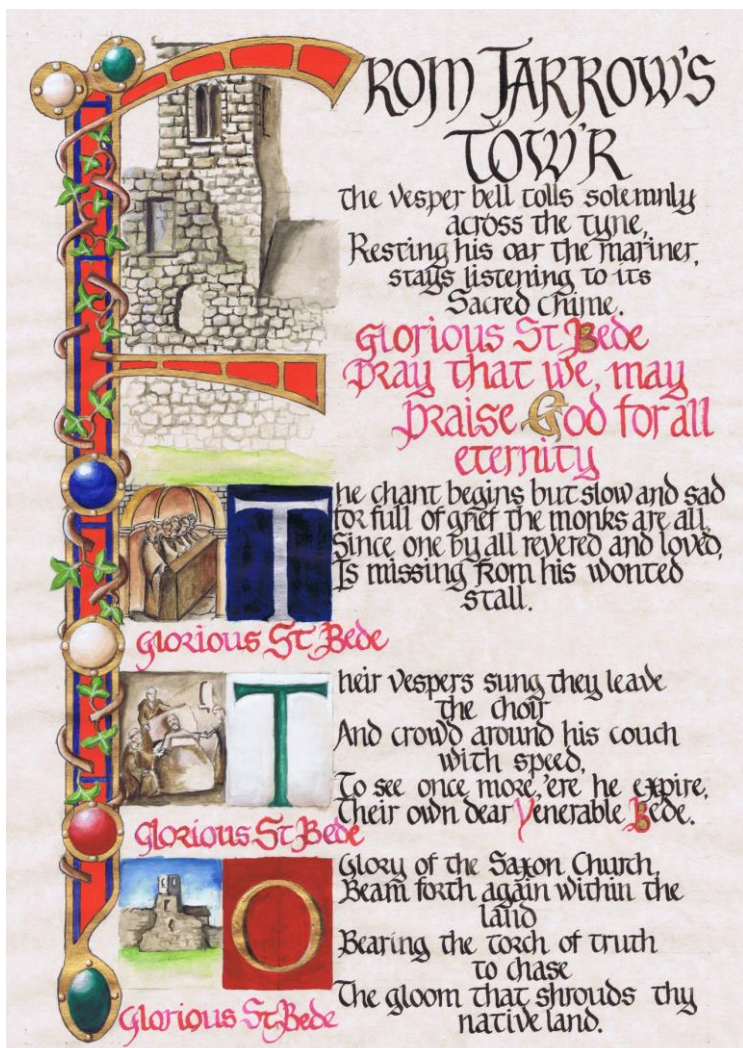
Saint Bede was writing about the story in Saint Matthew's Gospel of the call of Matthew, the tax collector. Jesus sees Matthew and in loving mercy and choice calls him to be a disciple. Francis used this motto long before he became Pope because he understood that he too, had been chosen and shown mercy by Jesus.

It is a message for us all – each of us is loved by Jesus no matter what and he calls us to be his disciples.

The people of Jarrow recognise in Saint Bede their best and greatest. He himself was a person of great humility and ended his days surrounded by members of the community with whom he had shared his life. His last words were from the prayer:

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
as it was in the beginning,
is now,
and ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen.

A hymn, well-loved by Catholics in Jarrow, recalls the life and death of St. Bede



From Jarrow's tower the Vesper bell
Tolls solemnly across the Tyne;
Resting his oar, the mariner
Stays listening to its sacred chime.

*Glorious Saint Bede, pray that we
may praise God for all eternity.*

The chant begins but slow and sad,
For full of grief the monks are all,
Since one by all revered and loved,
Is missing from his wonted stall.

Their Vespers sung they leave the choir
And crowd around his couch with speed,
To see once more, 'ere he expire
Their own dear Venerable Bede.

O Glory of the Saxon Church,
Beam forth again within the land
Bearing the torch of truth to chase
The gloom that shrouds thy native land.

We don't know who wrote the hymn but the tune that is used was written by Canon William Knight (1808-1874) who was parish priest in St. Mary's Hartlepool for many years and an accomplished musician.

Catholic worship at Saint Paul's ended at the Reformation and the Catholic community experienced a period of sustained persecution. A few held on to Catholicism in this part of the world but they did so secretly. Only on occasion did their activity come to attention of the authorities. In a letter of 1626 to the Privy Council, Richard Neile, the Bishop of Durham, mentions 'Anthony Berrye of Jarrow' who was a recusant (one who refused to conform to the requirement to attend worship in the Church of England).

Berrye, along with Sir Robert Hodgson (Hodgson) of Hebburn Hall and Hodgson's servant, John Duvel, had received 'popish passengers'. Another servant of Hodgson was imprisoned for bringing these passengers from Calais along with a fardell (package) containing books connected with Catholic worship. The passengers would have been priests coming from the Continent to serve the hidden Catholic community.

Times have changed since those days of persecution. Thank God, the days of conflict between Christian denominations are over. We share very good relations with our brothers and sisters in Christ and we do all that we can together. In Jarrow the clergy and parishioners from all the Christian traditions meet regularly in friendship, reflection and worship.