

Homily for the Feast of St. Bede the Venerable
May 25, 2007

I think that if St. Bede could see as clearly into the future as he could the past, he might allow himself the slight disappointment of being remembered (if he is remembered at all) as an historian. I am sure he would have preferred to be remembered as a theologian and an exegete.

St. Bede, like all good historians and like the authors of the Acts of the Apostles, the Gospel of St. Luke and much of the Old Testament, understood that history is merely the concrete working out in time of God's plan of salvation for us in the here and now. Our modern mentality finds this hard to accept.

We are a people who rather dislikes the past and we find history to be burdensome and unpleasant (I know this because I spend a lot of my time trying to teach it to people who would rather not be learning it!) We much prefer to live in the future. We are a society always waiting for the next up-grade, that almost religiously trusts the future will be better than the past. We spend much effort and time in strategic planning, trying to anticipate and compensate for potential risks and have a sense of being relentlessly driven forward by everything around us. For us living in the present moment is very challenging. We sense the precariousness of the present and our hope leads us to look for a brighter future.

However, no amount of technology or planning can guarantee that the future will be any better than the past or more stable than the present. From St. Bede's own writings, we have a precious and remarkable glimpse into a thriving Anglo-Saxon Christian culture which in his day was only a generation old but which very soon after Bede's death would be totally swept away in the onslaught of the Viking invasions. This Christian and monastic culture would only fully recover 300 years later.

St. Bede's own uneventful life provides a model of what it means to truly live in the present moment. John Henry Cardinal Newman described it thus:

"To the monk heaven was next door; he formed no plans, he had no cares; the ravens of his father Benedict were ever

at his side. He 'went forth' in his youth 'to his work and his labour' until the evening of his life; if he lived a day longer, he did a day's more work; whether he lived many days or few, he laboured till the end of them. He had no wish to see further in advance of his journey than where he was to make his next stage. He ploughed and sowed, he prayed, he meditated, he studied, he wrote, he taught, then he died and went to heaven."

*John Henry, Cardinal Newman -
Historical Sketches*