

13 Theodore of Tarsus, Archbishop of Canterbury (602-690)

Observed 19 September

Theodore is known as the first church prelate whom all England obeyed. He is also known as an appealing and gifted scholar who brought learning of ancient languages, of scripture, of church tradition, of history, of science and mathematics to the island nation. His persistent efforts and force of personality brought unity and discipline to the English Church. Theodore was born in Tarsus (like Saint Paul) and spent his early life amid the terrible wars between Byzantium and the Persian Empire. Despite the difficulties of life surrounded by such conflict, he became a gifted scholar. When conquest drove him out of his home city, he moved to Constantinople where he explored all of the scholarly disciplines of the time. Later in life he moved to Rome where he lived in a community of Eastern monks and added extensive knowledge of Latin thought and literature to his already vast store of learning. When Theodore was in his mid sixties, he was chosen to be Archbishop of Canterbury after the sudden death of the man sent to Rome for consecration to that post by the Pope. The new archbishop had never been to Britain, but this was a time when scholars and church leaders moved from place to place without regard to nationality. When he arrived and set out to visit all of the dioceses in his new land, he found both civil and church life in considerable disarray, with conflicts abounding. He immediately set about bringing orderliness and organization. His leadership enabled disputes to be settled and peace to prevail. He also established an impressive school at Canterbury which drew students from all over and began a Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon learning. Not everyone was pleased with his enforcement of the continental traditions, but all agreed that life was better when all could focus on the Life of the Kingdom instead of disagreements among neighbors. The diocesan boundaries and system of Canon Law that Archbishop Theodore established remain essentially intact today. Although his home was far, far away, Theodore is clearly one of the fathers of the English Church we know, a model of cooperation and reasonableness.

Lessons: Malachi 2:5-7, Psalm 71:18-23; II Timothy 2:1-5.10; Matthew 8:23-27

Collect: Almighty God, who called your servant Theodore of Tarsus from Rome to the see of Canterbury, and gave him gifts of grace and wisdom to establish unity where there had been division, and order where there had been chaos: Create in thy Church, we pray, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, such godly union and concord that it may proclaim, both by word and example, the Gospel of the Prince of Peace; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.