



Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia

## 2009 Fursey Pilgrimage Homily by Bishop Michael Evans

On Sunday 8th March 2009, Bishop Graham James of Norwich and I were together at St John's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Norwich for our annual 'Two Cathedrals' evening prayer, talks and discussion.

It was the Feast of St Felix, and each of us spoke about this great Apostle of East Anglia and how we are called to do the same as he did - to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the East Angles of today. Although our focus was very much on St Felix, neither of us could speak of him without mentioning St Fursey as well.

Both arrived in East Anglia about the same time - around 630. Felix came from France to East Anglia. Fursey came from Ireland to East Anglia, and eventually moved on to France. In passing, although many great missionaries came from Ireland to bring the Gospel to our country, we need to remember where Ireland got the faith from in the first place, especially from the Romano-Briton Patricius (Patrick), who probably came from somewhere in north west England!

Both Felix and Fursey were travellers, wanderers, pilgrims bearers of the Good News. That is perhaps one of the most important things we can learn from them, and from Fursey in particular. Each lived a life of pilgrimage, even when settled in a particular place.

There is often a temptation for us to remain all too settled, to stay in that 'place' in life where we feel spiritually comfortable.

Perhaps this was a danger for Peter, James and John at the Transfiguration in today's Gospel reading. It was perfectly understandable. They had a wonderful experience: as they said, 'Master, it is good for us to be here.' Who wouldn't want to extend such an experience as long as possible? Peter suggests putting up three tents, one each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, but I wonder whether he was feeling that it was he and his companions who really wanted to stay up the mountain, away from risk and hassle. But it was time for them to move on, back down the mountain, and off to Jerusalem for the passion and death of the Messiah.

We too need to be wary of becoming too settled, too comfortable, even in our spiritual lives. The life of St Fursey challenges us about this. We are all called to mission.

Perhaps Fursey should be declared the patron saint of itchy feet! I have a sense that Fursey's feet were more itchy than those of Felix. Fursey had travelled around Ireland for twelve years, preaching with great power. Then he came to East Anglia, but again eventually he moved on to France.

As the Venerable Bede put it in his *Ecclesiastical History*, 'His purpose was to spend his life as a pilgrim for the love of our Lord, and to go wherever he found an opening' (3.19)

We are called to do the same. This does not mean we all have to keep moving around from country to country, but we are increasingly a mobile people, always on the move from place to place, from person to person. Our modern means of communication make us even more mobile.

We should see ourselves as 'pilgrims for the love of our Lord', and wherever we go and whoever we meet as an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel.

Sometimes this will be by our words, but also like St Fursey by the way we live. Our lives should radiate something of the dazzling holiness and love of God's own Son, his Chosen One.

Today's pilgrimage is a symbol of our essential state of being as Christians. To be a Christian is to be a pilgrim, a member of God's pilgrim people. But we are not just pilgrims - we are pilgrims with a purpose. We should be fired with the same sense of the urgency of preaching the Gospel to East Anglia as Fursey and his friends.

Let us listen together to God's Son, the Chosen One, and use every opportunity to bring his healing and saving love to our world.

Let us pray for itchy feet - and for mouths and lives that proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.