



The Bishop of Ebbsfleet's Pastoral Letter - November 2008

Alas! Poor St Andrew

S T ANDREW – naturally – is of special interest to those who bear his name, as I do. And, greatly blessed, it was on St Andrew's Day, 2000, that I received episcopal ordination and began work as Bishop of Ebbsfleet. Unfortunately, unless your church is dedicated to St Andrew, St Andrew's Day this year gets swept away by Advent Sunday, which falls on 30th November. Alas! Poor St Andrew.

What we know about St Andrew can be told in very few words. He was linked by the earliest list of New Testament books we have - the Muratorian Canon (2nd century?) - with the writing of St John's Gospel and certainly that gospel tells us more than the other three do about Andrew. He came from Bethsaida, a little town on the north east shore of Galilee, but lived and worked as a fisherman at nearby Capernaum. He was a follower of John the Baptist, who decided instead to follow Jesus and persuaded his brother Simon to do so too (John 1:35-42). 'We have found the Messiah', he told Simon, who by Jesus was thereupon given the nickname 'Peter', the rock. John's Gospel also tells us that Andrew said to Jesus at the time of the feeding of the five thousand 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?' 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus', say some Greeks to Philip (the other disciple with a Greek name, who also came from Bethsaida) and Philip and Andrew go and tell Jesus (John 12:22).

So far we have relied entirely on the Fourth Gospel for our information. But we read of the call of Andrew in Matthew and in Mark and he is in the list of the Twelve in Luke also. He is not part of the inner group of three, but he is mentioned with Peter, James, and John enquiring about the fate of Jerusalem in Mark 13:3.

What then? An independent tradition tells us that it was on an X-shaped Cross that Andrew was crucified at Patras in Greece. Andrew's head was captured by crusaders from the Turks in 1461 and brought to Rome. It was returned to Constantinople, centre of the Eastern Orthodox world, by Pope Paul VI. There is, I am afraid, no substance to the legend that St Andrew's bones were taken to Scotland.... He is the patron saint of Greece and Russia, as well as Scotland, and, of course, of fishermen.

He is linked with the Missionary work of the Church and it is about evangelism - spreading the Gospel- that he is certainly important. It is the three direct quotes from scripture which teach us most about evangelism:

- (1) Andrew told Simon Peter, 'We have found the Messiah'. **We need to tell people.**
- (2) Andrew said to Jesus, 'There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish....' **We need to pray and we need to help make things happen.**
- (3) '...some Greeks came to Philip...and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus". Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus'. **We need to work together to spread the Word and to bring people to know Jesus.**

May God bless us as we work to proclaim the Gospel and so advance his Kingdom.

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