

SOLEMNITY OF ST CHAD: 2 MARCH 2021
ST CHAD'S CATHEDRAL

Be joyful in hope, persevere in hardship, keep praying regularly.

Our celebration of the Feast of St Chad takes on a special character this year since our annual celebration of our patron-saint is subject to the coronavirus pandemic restrictions which are still in place. It is a welcome coincidence that the Holy See has asked every bishop in England and Wales to offer Mass on this day for the intentions of those who have died during the pandemic or as a result of Covid-19.

While St Chad's feastday is always an occasion for joyful thanksgiving in the parishes, schools, chaplaincies and Religious communities of our Archdiocese, this year is also a moment to pause and pray for the faithful departed whom we have lost in the past year and for the families and friends who continue to mourn their loss.

The pandemic has reminded us that we are all vulnerable and in need of protection against sickness and disease. It has recalled many of us to a deeper sense of our daily dependence on God. It has also made us grateful for the remarkable gifts of learning and invention that have led to the discovery in record time of the vaccines on which we are now pinning our hopes for the future.

These developments in medicine and science, triggered by the coronavirus pandemic, are also a reminder of the loving Creator who has gifted human beings with the desire to help others and the ingenuity and skill to discover how best to do this. As Lent unfolds and we see the signs of Spring around us our spirits are also lifted by the progress of the vaccination programme and we offer thanks to the Lord for all these indications of his merciful love.

Our patron St Chad would have been no stranger to the anxieties and concerns that have been visited upon us during the last year of the current pandemic. During the second half of the seventh century a large part of the British Isles was affected by severe outbreaks of epidemic disease. St Bede recorded the onset of a devastating plague in 664: *And the pestilence*

came...a sudden pestilence raging far and wide with fierce destruction that laid low a great multitude of men. He wrote of the mortality that ravaged Britain and Ireland with cruel devastation...the pestilence that carried off many throughout the length and breadth of Britain.

This makes St Chad's missionary journeys, from Northumbria and Yorkshire here to the Midlands, all the more remarkable. He clearly trusted in our Lord to keep him safe as he brought the Gospel to the communities he travelled to evangelize.

There is much that we can learn again about the Church's mission and our task of evangelization through the story of St Chad. Although we are separated from his time by nearly thirteen centuries we still recognise the essential elements of our faith in Christ that we share with St Chad and the Church of his time.

This wandering characteristic of St Chad's life as a monk and then as bishop, and his humble acceptance of God's will, holds a lesson for us today. They speak of his attentiveness to the voice of God, the promptings of the Holy Spirit, calling St Chad from place to place for the spread of the Gospel and the good of the Church. They also demonstrate a personal flexibility, a desire to put God's will first and the courage to do this in the face of plague and disease.

During our own time of pandemic we have needed to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to learn where our presence and our Christian witness are needed today. We have needed to be flexible like St Chad, to be able to turn to the next task for the sake of the Gospel – but all this without being reckless about our own health or the health and well-being of others.

Today we thank God for the heritage of faith that we have received through St Chad, who could say from the experience of his own ministry: *Be joyful in hope, persevere in hardship, keep praying regularly.* May our patron St Chad intercede for us and for all those who have died during the pandemic or because of Covid-19. May his prayers help us all to continue on our pilgrim way towards the joys of Easter.