

Britain has become England through the presence of the Angles and it's quite likely that Pope Gregory's desire to send a mission to these barbarians beyond the boundaries of Christendom, was inspired by his sight of angelic-looking young faces in Rome. For there is no evidence that he had any other great plan to follow. It was a one-off inspiration that was to have enormous implications for the Church and its subsequent spread not only throughout England but throughout the whole Anglo-Saxon world and worth celebrating precisely because, as Gregory recognised, God does great things with the weakest people and the smallest of initiatives on our part. There is sense in which we only have to be open to inspiration, make that first step, and leave the rest to God. For in Gregory's words

Through his death we live, by his weakness we are strengthened, by his death we are freed from suffering, through his love we seek in Britain brothers whom we do not know, and by his gift we find those whom in our ignorance we were seeking.

It's fitting that Augustine and his monks were at first so afraid of this mission to the barbarians that they turned back and needed Gregory's encouragement to continue and so as the mission succeeds Gregory is able to remind Augustine that

he has deigned to do rightly works among the Angles through weak men

and to warn him against any presumption

We must remember that, when the disciples returning in their joy from their preaching, said to their heavenly master, 'Lord in your name even demons are subject to us', they heard at once, 'Do not rejoice because of this but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

Gregory and Augustine are great because God is great – it's an angelic vision after all.

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