

Following Christ in the Footsteps of the Saints

‘The Christian creeds, our statements of what we believe, affirm that ‘we believe in the communion of saints’ – holy women and men who have been faithful followers of Jesus Christ and who have often lost their lives through persecution because of their faith.’

(*‘Ancient Wisdom, Modern Mission’*. Mission Theology Advisory Group)

In the Diocese of Lichfield we are invited to ‘Follow Christ in the footsteps of St. Chad’, the first Bishop of Lichfield, a man noted for his passion for the gospel and his travelling pilgrim ministry. In this diocese we are currently in a ‘Season of Pilgrimage’, looking towards St. Chad’s Day on March 2nd, 2022 when we will mark 1,350 years since the saints death in 672.

As a part of that season you are also warmly invited to join the St. Winefride’s Pilgrimage, a 70 mile journey (don’t worry, it’s not all in one go!) from Holywell in Wales, to Shrewsbury between Easter and Pentecost next year.

St. Winefride is thought to have been the daughter of a 7th century Welsh noble family, living in what is now the border country between England and Wales. Her mother, Wenlo, was sister to Beuno (St Beuno). Winefride was a faithful Christian, keen to learn about Jesus and to follow him, encouraged and taught by her uncle, Beuno. Dedication and commitment to her faith resulted in Winefride’s violent death, by decapitation, when she tried to escape the insistent advances of Caradog, a man from an aristocratic family who threatened to sexually attack her if she did not agree to marry him. At the place where her head fell to the ground, now called Holywell, a well of pure water sprang from the earth. Beuno, who was praying nearby, picked up her head, replaced it on her body, and she lived. Winefride continued to live a life of great holiness and became abbess of a nunnery at Gwytherin, North Wales. Her remains were brought to Shrewsbury Abbey in 1137.

This account of Winefride's dedication and faithful following of God's call, even to the point of courage in the face of threat and death, is also a story of restoration, transformation, healing and blessing. I hope that you will join us in giving thanks for this remarkable life of faith and in sharing the good news of God's love, shown to us in Jesus, as we reach out into the communities through which we will travel together.

You call us, Lord,

to leave familiar things and to leave our places of security.

May we open our eyes to new experiences,

may we open our ears to hear you speaking to us

and may we open our hearts to your love.

Grant that our time spent on pilgrimage

may help us to see ourselves as we really are

and may we strive to become the people you would have us be.

Amen.

+ Sarah Shrewsbury