



Podcast: Saint Etheldreda (Audrey) and Ely Cathedral, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2021  
Mgr Daniel McHugh

*Journey of Faith - Life from Holy Mass - with Monsignor Daniel McHugh*

Hello, I am Monsignor Daniel McHugh.

I must admit my admiration for Saint Etheldreda, a popular Saxon Saint, began when I visited Ely Cathedral some years ago now. What a wonderful, beautiful building it is, and within easy reach of the West Midlands. I am hoping this Podcast being written on the eve of her Feast 23<sup>rd</sup> June will lead you to consider a visit there: The Cathedral has its origins in 672 when Saint Etheldreda built an Abbey Church. The present building dates back to 1083. Until the Reformation it was the Church of St Etheldreda and St Peter. It was built in Romanesque style, while the galilee porch, lady chapel and choir were rebuilt in Gothic. The most notable feature is the Central Octagonal Tower with a lantern above, and, together with the West Tower, it dominates the surrounding landscape.

St Etheldreda, like so many great founders of Religious Communities, has her own amazing story: she was the daughter of the Anglo Saxon King Anna of East Anglia and was “married off” twice before she was allowed to have her wish, which was to be the spouse of Christ as a Religious.

Particularly interesting was the fact she founded a “dual monastery” at Ely for men and women in 673; she was abbess there until her death in 679. When she died, a shrine was built there to her memory. The popularity of St Etheldreda who led an austere life, resulted in a Festival on her Feast Day each year known as “St Audrey’s Fair”. It is said that exceptional shoddiness of merchandise, contributed to the word “tawdry”, a corruption of “Saint Audrey” entering the English Language.

I have to say I am the sort of Pilgrim who enjoys visiting places associated with great saints and taking inspiration from their lives. In the case of St Etheldreda, her strength of character, and determination to give her life to God in prayer and community life, continues to inspire the many visitors to the Cathedral of Ely which grew out of her Monastic Community.

Her relics were dispersed at the Reformation, and some are to be found at the local Catholic Church in Ely, and at the well-known St Etheldreda’s Church, Ely Place in London. This Catholic Church is on the site of what was formerly the Bishop of Ely’s London residence.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> June her Feast is celebrated there: in a way she is of course a long way from us and she lived at a time when a “vocation” was seen much more in terms of “Religious Communities” than today. But, whatever our vocation – family life, the single life, lay

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community – we take inspiration from the “Communion of Saints”, all those who have lived and are living the call to follow Christ to the full. And, we thank God that those who have been or are in “consecrated life” have our welfare at heart. I thought of this as I passed by the Carmelite Monastery at Dolgellau the other day on my way to walk and enjoy the lovely Welsh air. The community there, like the Bridgettine Sisters I was privileged to help bring to Maryvale, together with Saint Etheldreda and all the Saints, have us at heart. They stand alongside us in prayer as we face the challenges of daily life.

The reading from the Selection for Holy Men and Women, the Colossians 3:12-15.

The prayer, the Collect of the Mass of St Etheldreda

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