

Jubilee Year

Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Evesham

I am especially pleased to have been asked by Fr Christopher to celebrate this Mass on the First Saturday in May 2025; he has been doing a monthly Mass as the Immaculate Conception and St Egwin is one of the Jubilee Year Churches in the Archdiocese. I understand he has not been celebrating the Mass of the Sunday, but rather having his focus on Our Lady with Mass in her honour.

I remember coming here years ago with my parents when there was a Diocesan Pilgrimage in June, so it is good to see the tradition of honouring Mary here is being kept alive through the Archbishop's choice of it being one of the Jubilee Churches for Pilgrimage.

We think back to the extraordinary story of what took place here: I mean the story of Eoff and his experience of the Virgin Mary in his work minding pigs as a swineherd. From that earliest recorded apparition in England 701 grew one of the greatest Benedictine Abbeys in the country, later destroyed in the time of King Henry and his commissioners 1540.

Eoff or Eoves (I believe there are woods named after him near here) went to tell the Bishop, St Egwin of Worcester, and he came to investigate. He too had an experience of Mary appearing to him and this led to his beginning a Benedictine Monastery here that grew into the great Abbey where his remains were later buried.

Looking into the story afresh I came across a Youtube video produced by Shalom World entitled "Evesham Abbey: Unearthing History and Miracles". The presenter, Niall McDonagh, came to Evesham and took special interest in the swineherd: looking at his sculpture close to the market square, a beautiful piece of work, Niall speaks of the man's life as a swineherd and the amazement he must have experienced. He quotes the famous Bishop Fulton Sheen – proclaimed venerable servant of God by Pope Benedict in 2012 – Sheen, a great communicator and preacher, said: "There are 2 classes of people who discover God – the very simple

and the very learned” and McDonagh went on to see those words founded in the example of the “shepherds” and “the wise” men at the birth of Jesus. Eoff was a humble simple man like the shepherds; the wise men knew what they didn’t know. I think of St Egwin in the image of the wise men who sought the truth.

In the video Niall speaks of the ruins of the Abbey, little being left of it except the great tower for some unknown reason, and he thought of it as a symbol of Hope for the future. He goes on to reflect on Mary as the woman of Hope: the woman who went through all that could have led to despair, but continued to Hope despite the stable for the Birth of Jesus, and the exile in Egypt, and the Crucifixion. Mary hoped because she believed God had a plan. Given that Pope Francis had designated the Jubilee as a Year of Hope, it is indeed a wonderful way to look on a pilgrim visit to Our Lady of Evesham. In a difficult and broken world – and maybe many of us carrying our own cross in life – Mary the woman of Hope is very appropriate. Mary came to a man who I am sure needed her reassurance in a simple hardworking life, and she comes to us too in this Jubilee Year. Pope Francis is our example of a man off hope, who placed his trust in Mary, and is now entombed near her image “Mary Salus Populi Romani” - Mary the Healer of the Roman People. Mary the one who stood in her Apparition to the poor people of Knock in the West of Ireland. Mary who has stood by the monks and all those who have come to pray here on pilgrimage over the years. The tower of the Abbey remains despite the destruction an image of hope – and the stained glass image of the miracle of Eoff in St Lawrence Church will be a place of prayer for hope for me when I come with a Pilgrim Group from the Ethnic Chaplaincies (and all who wish to join us) in July, so will the monks garden which has grown up from the investigation of the ruins, the former cloister rediscovered! Please God many will rediscover the Hope of Mary in this special place: in the Jubilee Year.

I conclude with the Prayer to Our Lady of Evesham:

Virgin most holy Mother of the Word Incarnate.

Treasurer of graces.

Refuge of sinners.

We fly to your maternal love with lively faith.

And we ask you to obtain for us grace ever to do the will of God.

Into your most holy hands we commit the keeping of our hearts

Beseeching you for health of soul and body

In the certain hope that you

Our most loving Mother

Will hear our prayer

Amen