

Ushaw and Holy Island Pilgrimage Refection

Northumbria is a beautiful part of England which is steeped in history. It is one of the greatest centres for Christianity for our country. It is the land of St Cuthbert and St Oswald and our own St Bede and St Wilfrid. It is to this historical area that our own parish pilgrimage to Ushaw College and Holy Island set off. Led by Fr Mark and Susan Warburton, the coach soon became a haven of prayer and laughter with the rosary being recited followed by quizzes, bingo and singing. After a short stop at Barnard Castle, we approached the imposing Ushaw College, set on a hill in its own grounds, like many students for the priesthood would have done over the past 200 years.

After being allocated our rooms, we proceeded to navigate the labyrinth of corridors often ending up where we had started from! A very interesting tour of the College took place, with Fr Mark in our group often informing the guide of facts they themselves were unaware of. The evening meal was held in the very impressive dining room with its original huge dining table and chairs, surrounded by 16th century paintings. The warmth of the conversation made up for any deficiencies in the central heating system!

The following morning, we set off for Holy Island. The dark clouds lay heavy in the sky which all added to the atmosphere as we crossed the causeway to the Island, thinking what it must have been like for those early saints. A beautiful Mass led by Fr Bill was held on the Island. There was great hospitality shown by the local parishioners to us pilgrims. Time was allowed to visit the priory with the famous and beautiful rainbow arch and some very lovely olde world pubs.

Heading back across the causeway before the tide came in and cut off us, we headed for the place where St Aidan is buried. After a wrong turn which lead us through some farmer's fields, much to the annoyance of the owner as it was the lambing season, we found the church where he had died prior to heading home. Another evening of fun and laughter ensued. Fr Mark leading the singing with some vigorous actions, Fr Bill showing his connections with both Ireland and Liverpool with some wonderful songs (and voice) and Bishop John showing all his wisdom and knowledge ranging from the inscription on Bishops rings to the merits of a good malt whiskey.

The following morning, we had a wonderful Mass in St Cuthbert's chapel which really is one of the gothic masterpieces of our country. Mass was celebrated by our 3 priests. It was very emotional occasion as Fr Mark's mum watched him celebrate Mass in this chapel and preach for the first time there since his ordination some 25 years previous.

Heading home we stopped in Durham where some of us managed to climb the hill to see the impressive cathedral and venerate at the tomb of St Bede who is buried there. God showed us the wonder of his nature as we all got drenched returning to the coach! Journeying home with the now regular rosary and bingo and singing we all arrived back in Widnes spiritually enriched and with a warm sense of companionship and friendship from our pilgrimage.



Footnote. There is a folder in the parish office with circa 150 photographs of the pilgrimage for anybody to view. It will remain there for a few weeks prior to being moved to the parish archives.

Peter Mc Cann