

May 27

# St. Augustine of Canterbury

d. 604 • Italy

Far from Rome, in England, was a people ready to receive the gift of faith. Ancient Romans once lived in England. They built wide roads, great cities, and Christian churches. But the Romans had left long ago, and their cities and churches were now ghostly ruins, and ancient Christianity in England nothing more than the whisper of a memory.

Pope Gregory the Great, in Rome, knew that it was time for Christianity to live in England once again. Æthelberht, the noble and pagan English king of Kent, had married the Christian princess Bertha. Gregory believed Æthelberht would kindly receive Christian missionaries from Rome in honor of his queen.

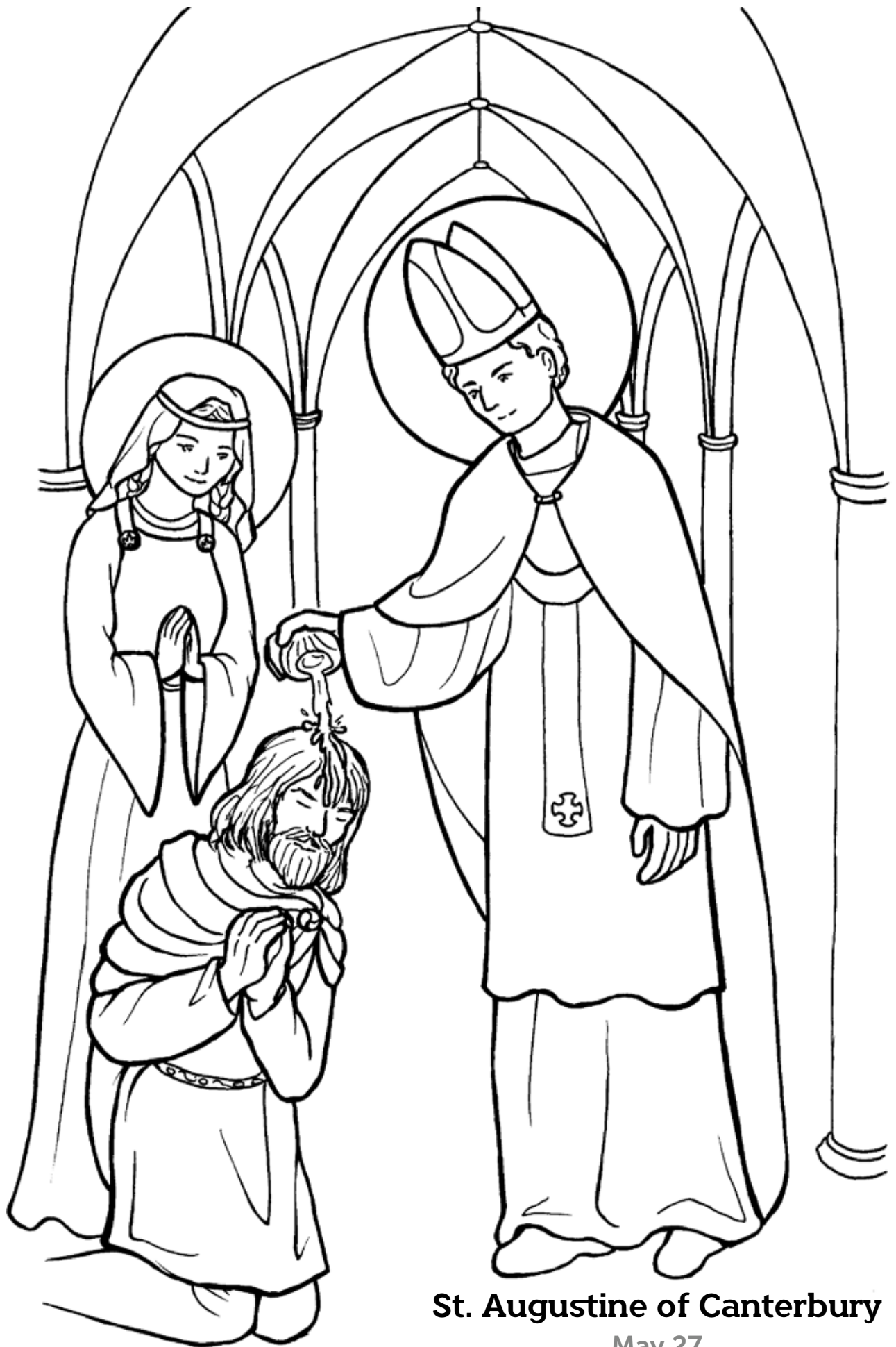
Pope Gregory chose Augustine, the prior of the Abbey of St. Andrew's in Rome, to lead a group of monks to England. The journey would be dangerous. Sailing the ocean could mean storms and shipwreck. But the monks were even more frightened of living in a barbaric land. They were afraid the English pagans would hunt and kill them. They were so frightened that, right before they set sail for England, they sent Augustine back to Rome to beg the pope to let them return home. But the pope sent them a letter full of encouraging words. "They must be brave!" he said. "They must preach the Good News of Christ to the English!"

Augustine and his monks landed on the English shore. King Æthelberht arranged a meeting under an oak tree. Augustine and his men met the king, chanting prayers and holding high an image of Christ. King Æthelberht saw that Augustine and his men came in peace. He allowed them to preach the Catholic Faith in England and gave them a home in Canterbury, his capital city.

In Canterbury stood the ruins of St. Martin's Church, a church built by the Romans of the past. Now Augustine and his men from present-day Rome gathered at St. Martins and said Mass. Augustine and his monks lived lives of poverty and prayer. Their holiness was so inspiring that the king's heart was drawn to Jesus.

Augustine baptized King Æthelberht within the year after he had landed. Ten thousand of the king's subjects were also baptized with their king. Now Augustine and his men could preach Christianity all throughout the country. Because of Augustine, the Catholic Faith lived in England once again. Augustine served the growing English Church until he died a holy death.

St. Augustine of Canterbury, help us bravely go to wherever God sends us!



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