

‘Jesus with the blue feet’

In St Martin’s Chapel, University of Cumbria was one stained glass window. It was tucked away in a back chapel. It showed a Roman soldier standing next to a horse putting half his cloak around a beggar. To show that the beggar is cold, his feet were a vivid blue. This window commemorated St Martin in one of the most famous acts of Christian Charity. However it didn’t quite get it right.

I will put to one side details of uniform and the horse etc. Its main fault is to show Martin with the symbol of Christ on his uniform. For St Martin this event was in fact the completion of his conversion to Christianity, his act of charity being before he fully “owned” the cross of Christ as his own. He had been interested, attended the local church meetings, but had not been baptised.

For to be baptised would have meant having to leave the Roman Army. He had been out that evening with the church working with the poor and the hungry and near to the gates of the garrison saw one final beggar whom he clothed with half of his cloak. (Thus avoiding a charge for being incorrectly dressed.)

The converting moment was that night when he slept, he saw in a dream Jesus wearing his cloak, saying, “I was the beggar whom you clothed.” This changed his life, he sought baptism, continued his commission as a medical auxillary and eventually was ordained and became a bishop and ran a community that shaped the church in western Europe.

The saints of the past (St Martin’s Day is the 11 November) faced different yet similar challenges to ourselves and have much to teach us by their example. For me part of the challenge of Martin was that whilst he thought he was bringing something of Christ to others in need, he was in truth serving Christ and encountering him in the most unlikely of places and having his own life changed by it.

Mission in the name of Christ is both sharing him and also serving him in others, even in the unlikely places, even Jesus with the blue feet.

Archdeacon Michael