ANONYMOUS

The Life of the Venerable Bede

Vita Bedae

SABBATISMUS

Anonymous (post 735)
Vita Bedae · The Life of the Venerable Bede

Latin text: public domain.
Translation, alignment and edition © 2026 Inversiones San Juan Diego (Sabbatismus). Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY-SA 4.0).

Sabbatismus is the imprint of the Inversiones San Juan Diego foundation, San Pedro Sula, Honduras.
Set in EB Garamond and Cinzel.
sabbatismus.com

The Life of Bede

Among the catholic expounders of Holy Scripture who shone as lights of the world in the second rank after the apostles, Bede, a priest of sacred learning and a monk whose life is worth imitating, holds a name and a place of surpassing honour. Not undeservedly does Holy Church admit him into the number of the doctors; for, imitating their study, diligence and purpose in the Holy Scriptures as he followed them in meditation and in writing, this true Israelite offered a great share of the sacred gift for the defence and adornment of the house of God. For he published not a few volumes in explanation of the divine oracles, seasoned with apostolic salt; and these, made firm upon the rock of the inviolable faith, can be shaken by no assault of the gates of hell. Before his death, indeed, the name of this man lay hidden in obscurity, since he lived beyond the edge of the world, on an island of the Ocean; but after his death — as God, in the words of Scripture, brings forth the clouds from the ends of the earth (Ps 135:7) — he lives in his books in the memory of the faithful wherever the sound of the apostles has reached, and, a lamp set upon the lampstand of the Church, he gives light to all who are in the house of God; so that Mother Church, who had enlightened him when she gave

him new birth in Christ Jesus, he in his turn, with the help of God's grace, might enlighten by his writings. Since, then, by the merit of his teaching he sits so loftily with the princes of the Churches and holds among them a throne of glory, crying out with them among all the nations and lifting up the voice of the Gospel like a trumpet, the great brightness of so illustrious a man seems to be darkened by a kind of cloud of disregard, if where he came from, who he was, what his life was, or what manner of end that life had, should pass by the ears of the Church in silence, as though it were something useless or even unworthy, which it were better not to know. Far be the taint of any such suspicion from that chosen vessel and instrument of the Holy Spirit; for just as faith is strengthened by his teaching, so too, if only the example of his life is made known, the love of faith is kindled no less ardently. Planted in the house of the Lord from his very cradle, and growing up like a palm as grace advanced him, he put forth the flowers of righteousness, ever proclaiming the mercy and the truth of God on the ten-stringed psaltery, and joining to the song of words the harp of good works. For, brought up among saints and by saints under the discipline of the monastery, and generously schooled in letters, he ran the course of his years holy with the holy and innocent with the innocent, and strove with all his might to keep himself unspotted from this world (Jas 1:27). To make this certain beyond doubt, we have gathered from various places writings both his own about himself and those of

others; and so, as though the little members had been brought together from here and there into the single frame of one body, we have portrayed in our description a man perfect in Christ. For the sequence of these writings, which, scattered and broken up through the volumes of various authors, had cut short the reader's knowledge of this memorable man, now joined together as the order of his deeds requires, gives a clearer shape to our acquaintance with him through the force of an orderly reading. And certainly the difficulty of this task, which the vigorous diligence of the learned takes on with ease, surpasses the strength of us who can do nothing worthily either in speech or in knowledge. But since all things are possible to him who believes (Mk 9:23), we who believe in the Word shall not fail for words — I mean Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24); and that we may be found worthy to have him as the beginning and the end of our work and of our speech, may his mercy deign to go before whatever we are to say or to do by inspiring it, and to follow it by helping.

The Life of the Venerable Bede, Priest and Monk of Jarrow

When Christ Jesus, the author of human salvation, was sending labourers of holy preaching into the harvest of the multitude that was to believe, and the grace of the Gospel was already shining through the whole world upon every creature, the province of the Northumbrians too, though shut off from the world in an almost uttermost situation, came to share in the knowledge of God, and in the cold region of the North it glowed with the sacred fire of the Saviour. For the Lord came to cast the fire of the Holy Spirit upon the earth; and since there is none that can hide himself from its heat (Ps 19:7), he reaches even the farthest of the nations and works the flames of his love in human hearts, so that, departing from the oldness of life, they may become a new creature in Christ. And so, once the faith had been received, out of unbelievers, who according to Scripture are the sides of that apostate North, the city of the great King is founded there, which, rejoicing in the praise of its founder with the exultation of the whole earth, proclaims: Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God (Ps 48:2). To begin, indeed, with the highest: the very kings of that province, once they had come to know the Creator, reigned the more

truly the more devoutly they rejoiced to serve Christ, the King of the ages; and, as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem that is to come, bearing the burdens of public government, they served Babylon only as men pressed into service. To this bears witness the fervent and pious devotion to religion in King Edwin; to this bears witness, too, the unconquerable constancy of faith in Oswald, who, since he gloried in nothing save the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 6:14), triumphed by the cross as victor over the enemies of the holy cross, and, having distributed the riches of his kingdom for the relief of the poor, entered heaven to be glorified with a double crown, the crown of mercy and the crown of martyrdom. In his brother Oswiu the zeal for the house of God blazed up, and whatever tares the enemy had sown, through men in error and schismatics, over the good seed of the Gospel, it cut down with the sickle of catholic truth, tore up by the roots and drove out of his kingdom. I say nothing of the energy of his son Ecgfrith; I pass over the counsel and favour he bestowed on the building of monasteries throughout his kingdom. Trustworthy writings testify that he was most pious and beloved of God. To pass over other things, this above all crowns his praises, that he had caused the blessed Cuthbert, a man of virtue and angelic in his way of life, to be raised to the episcopate. Happy, and not undeservedly blessed, I would call the state of that province at that time, to which the life and teaching of priests exalted in Christ and in the Church were also a great adorn-

ment and defence. For, leaving aside the prelates of outstanding holiness whom that region had before or after, it cherished at one and the same time magnificent fathers of its enlightenment and salvation — I mean Wilfrid, Eata, Cuthbert and John — bishops truly illustrious and of incomparable merit. Under these twin rulers of the commonwealth and of the Church, as zeal for our most holy religion grew more fervent day by day, churches and monasteries were freely built everywhere; and in them men gathered together who were to be fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God, so that they might live spiritually in the flesh, and, denying alike their possessions and themselves, they carried the cross of the Saviour by their way of life and burned themselves up wholly to the Lord, through the fire of heavenly love, as a whole burnt offering of sweetest fragrance.

Among these men, sworn together in the service of Christ and fighting against the world and the prince of the world, the abbot Benedict stood out for deeds truly conspicuous in Christ, having obtained from the Lord that very grace of blessing which his name had foretold. For, so that when one day he entered into the joy of his Lord he might have multiplied the talents entrusted to him, he founded two monasteries, which nevertheless were one by an indissoluble bond of peace and charity; the one he had established at the mouth of the river Wear in honour of the blessed Peter, prince of the apostles, the other at Jarrow in honour of Paul, the teacher

of the nations. What more need I say? After the example of the blessed patriarch Abraham, going out from the land and the kindred of their old and worldly life, many children of God who had been scattered were gathered there into one; and, meaning to build with their lives the tower of Gospel perfection, they renounced everything and, poor by their own choice, followed the poor Christ. So a numerous and noble swarm of monks soon grew up in both places, and there learned by experience the delightful sweetness of that blessed fellowship which the psalm proclaims: how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity (Ps 133:1).

The devout care of parents, too, entrusted to Benedict their children of good promise to be brought up for God, so that, formed by most holy teachings, they might forget their own people and their father's house (Ps 45:11); and thus, being presented in their tender years as a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God (Rom 12:1), they might begin to serve the spirit before they could know the things of flesh and blood. One of these — or rather, above all the others, the one child of fine promise — was Bede, who at seven years old was handed over by his parents into the monastery, to the man of holiness we have mentioned, to be fitted for the service of the Godhead alone. He was born in a small village in the territory of Jarrow, past which the river Tyne flows in its unfailing depth, not far from where it falls into the Ocean.

The year of his birth, as is gathered by the reckoning of the chronicles, is found to be the six hundred and seventy-seventh of the Word incarnate; which is reckoned the seventh of the reign of Ecgfrith, king of the people beyond the Humber, and the fourth since the founding of the aforesaid monastery of the blessed Peter. In this monastery first, and afterwards in that of the apostle Paul, his childhood was brought up under the rein of discipline; and, given over to the Lord after the example of the blessed Samuel of old, the boy dwelt in the temple of God, so that one day he might make known to the peoples the secrets of the words of God revealed to him in the ear of the heart. But so that he might be able to do this as his years advanced, and lest the liberal studies to which he was devoted should have little or no effect in the boy, even at that age a great intelligence sparkled in him, by God's doing, from the force of his natural gifts. When, having acquired the knowledge of the liberal arts, he had polished his mind by practice for grasping higher things, he strove to enter the depths of the Holy Scriptures and to penetrate them, and spent on understanding them whatever strength he had, joining to his longing and his labour prayer in the Psalmist's own words: Unveil my eyes, he says, and I will consider the wonders of your law (Ps 119:18). And because he asked in faith, nothing wavering, there was given him from the Father of lights the best gift and the perfect gift of wisdom — not the wisdom of this world, which is brought to nothing, but that which the Apostle preaches,

the wisdom of God hidden in mysteries. For he received, for the pursuit of continual meditation on the law of the Lord, the watchful eye of a most penetrating understanding; and to this was added, together with an abundance of sacred books, the assiduous and constant diligence of masters proven in ecclesiastical letters. So, as they planted and watered in hope of good fruit, the youth of this memorable man was cultivated. And, God giving the increase, a fruitful olive tree was made ready in the house of God, that is, in the Church.

But perhaps someone, not readily believing these things, admits them only with difficulty; for, as even an author of worldly eloquence testifies, "what each man thinks easy for him to do, he accepts with equanimity; what lies beyond that, he regards as invented and false." For who would not be astonished, or even declare it past belief, that such charisms of spiritual gifts should abound in the farthest corner of the world, so that the Holy Scriptures were not only read there, but their mysteries were also expounded, to be spread from there across the breadth of the world? Even if the name of Christ had never been heard there, it would surely be no wonder, in a place where, to speak like a poet, Boreas arrives on failing wing. But on this point the piety of faith will satisfy the doubter, for it affirms that the majesty of the almighty Spirit is stretched across no local spaces and shut in by no narrow bounds, but is present to all things everywhere, and that his almighty power bestows the grace of his in-

spiration where he wills: Where, it says, shall I go from your spirit, and where shall I flee from your face? (Ps 139:7) Let me say briefly, then, by whose ministry the breath of the Holy Spirit wafted the riches of his goodness to these farthest shores of the Ocean, so that where men had known nothing but barbarous snarling, there, searching out the wonderful testimonies of the Lord, they declared with their lips all the judgements of the mouth of God. That man of venerable life of whom we spoke above, Benedict in grace and in name, often went back to Rome as the tireless provider for his church — five times, indeed, he journeyed there for the good of the monastery — and among the very many ornaments he had brought for the beauty of the house of God, he also carried home, as we read, a countless store of books of every kind. For whatever England could not supply of use and beauty for the Church, Gaul or Rome offered to the devout trader, either to be given freely by friends or to be bought at an agreed price. He experienced, too, no small munificence from the glorious pontiffs of the apostolic see, Vitalian and afterwards Agatho, for the safeguarding of the monastery he had built and for the magnificent furnishing of its church. It was he, too, who at the command of Pope Vitalian brought to Britain Archbishop Theodore and his colleague Abbot Hadrian, men truly apostolic and most fitting ministers of the word of God, as being amply instructed in the knowledge of both philosophies, the secular and the ecclesiastical, and that in both languages, Greek and

Latin. They travelled through the whole island wherever the peoples of the English dwelt and gathered bands of disciples, and every day they poured out rivers of saving knowledge to water their hearts, so that, together with the volumes of the sacred writings, they also handed on to their hearers the disciplines of the art of metre, of astronomy and of ecclesiastical arithmetic. And whoever wished to be instructed in sacred reading had masters ready at hand to teach them. A proof of this is that long after them there survived many of their disciples who knew Latin and Greek as well as the tongue in which they were born. Let these few words suffice, lest in the farthest hiding places of the world the knowledge of the Scriptures in our theologian Bede should seem incredible; for the providence of the heavenly Teacher had brought together for his training both a sufficiency of sacred books and the diligence of masters distinguished in every branch of knowledge. For at the time when, as the aforesaid teachers and, after them, their disciples went about the churches of the English, the study of both literatures had flourished, the teachable youth, wholly given over to the love of learning, was exercising himself keenly, toiling at those same studies. And when he had gained a knowledge of Latin as of the vernacular tongue in which he was born, he also attained no small part of the knowledge of Greek. Besides, both he and the church of the apostles in which he lived had as their master of reading and chant John, abbot and archcantor of the holy Roman Church,

sent there by Pope Agatho for this very purpose at Benedict's request, and brought there by him. He himself testifies, moreover, that a certain monk named Trumbert, who had been brought up under the teaching of Bishop Chad, a truly holy man and well instructed in the Holy Scriptures, was his teacher in the sacred pages. He had many others too who went before him on the path of the Scriptures, for, living among six hundred fellow soldiers of the holy monastic warfare (for we read that the aforesaid monastery of the apostles Peter and Paul had that number of brothers), he strove after the better gifts in each of them; so that whatever spiritual knowledge each of them had received, he drank it all in, learning it thoroughly from each, that he might be inebriated with the plenty of the house of God, and that the Lord might make him drink of the torrent of his pleasure. And so, a most prudent bee of the Church, eager for the sweetness that pleases God, he gathered little flowers here and there from the full field which the Lord has blessed, so that, making honey from them as it were by the art of wisdom, he might compose words sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. As he burned for these studies of most holy philosophy, the grace of spiritual gifts grew in him with the increase of his years, so that with the spirit of wisdom and understanding he received also the spirit of the fear of the Lord, by which, chastising his body and bringing it into subjection, he might know, as the Apostle says, how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour (1 Thess 4:4).

Hence, while still in his nineteenth year, he was taken up as a holy Levite into the ministry of sacred things, as though chosen from among the other tribes; so that, serving at the altar of the Lord, he might have the Lord — my Lord — as his lot and the portion of his inheritance with the true Levites of the true sanctuary; the inheritance for which, with the Psalmist, he sighed in longing and cried out in sighing: The Lord, he says, is the portion of my inheritance (Ps 16:5), my hope and my portion in the land of the living (Ps 142:6). So, as deacon, he read the Gospel solemnly; and, to be in keeping with that Gospel reading, he shaped his life by the precepts of the Gospel, the loins of his mind girded and his feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. And now, at thirty years of age, the blessed man was applying himself to good effect to the studies of contemplation, when, behold, he was brought to the sacred altars in a higher order, where, together with the sacrifice of an afflicted spirit and a contrite heart, the Son is offered daily to the Father as a victim of propitiation and of reconciliation. From the time he received the priesthood he gave free rein to the keenness of his mind in explaining the Holy Scriptures; and, composing many books of catholic learning, all that until then he had chewed over by learning, reading and meditating — a clean animal, that is, which chews the cud — he now poured forth entire for divine uses in writing and teaching. Day by day he grew, advancing in mystical understanding, so much that, with grace as his teacher, he himself, now the

more expert, led into the abyss of a higher understanding many of the very men whom he had had as guides on the paths of the Scriptures. Thus, the inner chambers of the mysteries being thrown open, he gazed with the eye of a pure heart upon the holy of holies, while he in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3) made manifest to him the uncertain and hidden things of his wisdom; so that what he had learned in darkness he might speak in the light, and what he had heard in the ear he might preach upon the housetops of the church. And because he longed to understand on high the word of God, which according to the Psalmist is exceedingly fiery (Ps 119:140), he drew near as it were to the burning mountain on which the law was written by the finger of God; and there, while he searched out the secrets of the sacred mysteries, he entered in some sort with Moses into the cloud and the thick darkness. The brightness of the face of that same Moses, which carnal Israel could not look upon in its understanding of the law, our spiritual Israelite beheld freely with the eye of the intellect, the veil of ignorance that lies upon the heart of unbelievers being taken away. For where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom of understanding. And when he had perceived this freedom in the law of perfect liberty, his speech and his teaching, as the Apostle says, were not in the learned words of human wisdom, but in words of faith, comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor 2:13), so that the deep of the Old Testament might call upon the deep of the Gospel

in the voice of the cataracts, that is, in the voice of the prophets and the apostles.

Since, then, the grace of God shone forth in him so loftily, fame carried the name of this renowned man far and wide, pouring into the ears of the Church his excellence in the Scriptures. At once you might have seen in many the eagerness of the Queen of Sheba, who came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon (Mt 12:42); for very many flocked together even from afar to hear, through his interpreter, the wisdom of the true Solomon, that is, of our Peacemaker, who has made both one (Eph 2:14). Some, cleaving to him by living with him inseparably, attended on him as a master of authority; others, who could not be present, sent letters asking that knotty questions on passages of the Scriptures be untied for them, and obscure ones made clear. Whole books, too, of divine authority he discussed at the request of several, following in the footsteps of the Fathers and treating them more plainly, and he expounded them, as the saying goes, from the crown of the head to the tip of the last nail.

Hence, among other works, he brilliantly published six books of commentary on the Gospel of Luke, at the request of the most reverend Acca, bishop of Hexham, whose letter urging him to this work begins thus: "Often indeed I have suggested to your holy fraternity, both by writing when absent and by speaking when present, that after your Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles you would deign to write on the Gospel of Luke as

well. This you have so far preferred to put off with modest excuses rather than do." And further on in the letter: "Expound the blessed Luke in your clear style. And since Saint Ambrose passed over some things without discussing them, because to a man of such supreme learning they seemed plain and not worth inquiring into, take care to explain these too more diligently, after examining the works of the other Fathers, in your own words or in theirs. I believe, too, that to your most watchful study — you who spend your days and wakeful nights meditating on the law of the Lord — the Author of light will reveal, in a number of places which they have left aside, what ought to be understood. For it is altogether just, and fitting to the governance of the heavenly goodness and equity, that you, who have wholly set aside the affairs of the world and pursue with untiring mind the eternal and true light of wisdom, should obtain here the fruit of a purer understanding, and in the world to come contemplate with a pure heart him in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3), the King in his beauty (Isa 33:17)." With these words the holy man, to give us a glimpse of the holiness of the venerable doctor, shows him to have been both free from the occupations of the world and given up, in a leisure ever busy, to the contemplation of true and eternal wisdom.

In short, as Bede himself writes of himself, spending the whole time of his life dwelling in the oft-mentioned monastery of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, he gave all his effort, as

what has gone before already shows, to meditating on the Scriptures; and amid the observance of the regular discipline and the daily care of singing in the church, he always found it sweet either to learn, or to teach, or to write. So, when with the utmost zeal he had completed his books over twenty-nine years in a work beyond reproach, being now about to receive the reward of a holy life and of devoted labour in the Church, he groaned, burdened in the body of this death, longing that, the house of his earthly dwelling being dissolved, he might be found worthy to have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Hence, having set down, for an everlasting remembrance of himself, the titles of all the books he had composed, when the laying aside of his tent was now at hand, panting with the ardour of an incredible longing for the fountain of water springing up into eternal life, he added this little prayer.

"I pray you, good Jesus," he says, "that as you have graciously granted me to drink in sweetly the words of your knowledge, so you will also in your kindness grant me one day to come to you, the fountain of all knowledge, and to appear for ever before your face."

The Second Book

So the soul of the venerable man, sighing for God and melted by the fire of holy love, longed and fainted for the courts of the Lord (Ps 84:3), that, seeing the God of gods in Sion, when that which is in part has been done away, it might lay hold of that which is perfect, and what here it had seen through a glass in a riddle, there it might see face to face. The Godhead was graciously present to the prayers and cries of its suppliant servant, and, since he was to be crowned with mercy and compassion, willed that he be purged by the disciplines of loving chastisement, lest any spot or wrinkle of sin remain in him; so that, purer than the purest gold from the furnace of a long illness, he might shine, glowing red, as an ornament in the heavenly Jerusalem, which is built as a city.

And so he was suddenly seized with a grievous tightness of the chest, so that, as the passage of his windpipe grew difficult, his voice became very faint, constricted by his laboured breath. He laboured under this distress, his breath almost cut off, for many days, that is, for about fifty-three days; but so that power might be made perfect in weakness, he gladly gloried in his infirmities with the Apostle (2 Cor 12:9). For, except when weariness drove him for a little while into sleep, neither the sun by day nor the moon by night saw

him cease from the praises of God, so that even then, upon his bed of sorrow, he would break out into words of exultation and praise: I will praise you, O Lord, he said, in uprightness of heart; you chastise me sorely, but you do not give me over to death, so that, having entered the gates of justice, I may be found worthy to praise you for ever and ever with the blessed who dwell in your house (Ps 119:7; 118:18–19; 84:5). His saving teaching too — that rush of the river which is wont to gladden the city of God, that is, Holy Church — did not cease even then, though he was languishing, to flow from his mouth, as from a pipe of living water.

To this Cuthbert bears witness, writing to his fellow student Cuthwin — Cuthbert, who with others was constantly at the side of his master in his sickness and death: "Every day," he says, "he read the Holy Scriptures to us his disciples, and laid open their mystical senses. And after the reading, whatever was left of the daytime he spent in singing psalms, singing with the spirit and singing with the mind as well. For, taught by the blessed David, with praise he called upon the Lord, that he might be saved from his enemies (Ps 18:4), because the Lord is near to all who call upon him in truth, that he may do the will of those who fear him, and hear their prayer, and save them (Ps 145:18–19). Long before, he had corrected his little works with great care; and now too, though failing with weary breath, he unfailingly went back over certain very small points which had been neglected while he was

busy with greater things, correcting them again and again, so that when, resting henceforth from his labours, his place has been made in peace, and his dwelling in Sion (Ps 76:3), not only should his thought give no offence to the churchman who reads him, but neither should his style, by vowels gaping in hiatus or by harsh consonants, disturb the teachable grammarian. For, as someone says, however elegant and practised a talent may be, and however smoothly a style may run, worn by long use, yet unless it has been tended and polished by the author's hand, it smells of the dirt of neglect."

Meanwhile the memorable doctor was shaken by heavier gasps; and, now about to live in bliss after death, he was pressed hard towards the debt of death as his breath grew ever tighter, a deadly swelling having already taken hold of the lower parts of his body. Though he, a branch abiding in Christ the vine, had already borne fruit of sweet fragrance, yet God the husbandman pruned him by sharper scourging, that he might bring forth more saving fruit. But lest by murmuring against the will of his Lord he should curse God to his face, he consulted the sayings of the divine word, as at a mercy seat, for proofs of hope and exultation, such as this one: Son, do not be faint-hearted under the discipline of God, and you will not faint when you are rebuked by him. For whom the Lord loves he rebukes; he scourges every son whom he receives (Heb 12:5–6). For there is no son, says the Apostle, who, when he has sinned, is not scourged by his father (Heb

12:7). And again, of those predestined to the kingdom of God: He who did not spare his own Son, he says, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also give us all things with him? (Rom 8:32) "When this promise is fulfilled," he said, "what shall we be, what manner of beings shall we be, what good things shall we receive in that kingdom, since we have already received so great a pledge in Christ's dying for us!" On the other hand, he held nothing more unhappy than the happiness of sinners, who spend their days in prosperity, and in a moment go down to hell (Job 21:13), who are not in the labour of men, and are not scourged with men (Ps 73:5), so that they may be punished for ever with the demons. Indeed, because the divine severity rejects such men by a deep and just judgement, it lets them loose without hindrance into the desires of their hearts. Against them, in the person of lost and desperate Jerusalem, is uttered that fearful sentence of God as he forsakes her: I will no longer be angry with you; my jealousy has departed from you (Ezek 16:42). But those whom he has predestined as vessels of mercy, he visits their iniquities with the rod and their sins with stripes (Ps 89:33), and to them he will grant the good of the predestined inheritance when, as Scripture says, he gives sleep to his beloved (Ps 127:2). So too that saying of the blessed Ambrose: "I have not so lived," he says, "that I am ashamed to have lived among you; nor yet am I afraid to die." Brief praise indeed, but sufficient for a man of perfect life. Nor should it be put down to arrogance that

he brought forward, for the benefit of his hearers, something about himself that all might imitate, so that they might glorify our Father who is in heaven. And this at the very point of his last breath, when the praise of virtue does not lift up into pride the heart of the one praised, and kindles the hearers to the pursuit of virtue all the more strongly as the condition of the flesh sets the very necessity of death before their eyes. So too the Apostle — who had said before: I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God (1 Cor 15:9) — when the time of his departure was at hand, praising himself indeed, but in the Lord, so that he who glories should glory in the Lord (2 Cor 10:17): I have fought the good fight, he says, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; for the rest, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:7–8).

By these and similar testimonies of the Scriptures he had made himself in some sort a stranger to pain in his infirmities, breathing in, with tears of utter love, that great abundance of your sweetness, O Lord, which you have hidden for those who fear you, and have perfected for those who hope in you (Ps 31:20). Meanwhile the yearly round of the seasons began to bring back the festal day of the Church on which the Son of God, ascending in power to the heights of heaven, by his might led our captivity captive: a day, I say, longed for by Bede, which was to give him the end of the passing day and the beginning of the day that abides for ever and ever. And so, foreknow-

ing, as it seemed, the hour of his departure, on the day before he passed away he bade his disciples stay close by, so that whatever doubt still lingered in their minds they might lose no time in asking him, and might commit the answers to writing, lest forgetfulness blot them out. So the learners' questioning was mingled with weeping; nay, the voices of those eager to learn were choked by sobs. And while their unbounded grief could not have its fill even of tears, it stifled their breath in the very passage of the throat as it tried to come out. And not without reason; for the loss of such a master would leave them for ever bereft of teaching to equal his.

Then, as the end drew near, the devout ring of the brethren stood round him, and he exhorted them that, forgetting what lies behind and stretching forward to what lies ahead, they might win the palm of the upward call of God (Phil 3:13–14); and that they should remember, after the example of Joseph, that they must leave their cloak — that is, the ties of worldly things — to the Egyptian mistress, that is, to worldly lust; so that, overcoming her shameful embraces by flight, and bringing the flesh of sin into subjection, they might bring under their rule the kingdom of Egypt, that is, of the vices. He taught them that they could give proof of Christ dwelling in them in no other way than by the spirit of holy and undivided charity. So that those who are made one body of Christ by communion in the heavenly bread might not be severed by a spirit of dissension from the unity of that same body. And he

said: "O my dearest ones, since it is time to pay the debt owed to our condition, I beg you, pray to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, that through him in whom the prince of this world found nothing, he may send the angel of peace to meet me for my salvation, so that, surrounded by his protection, I may not be put to shame when I speak with my enemies in the gate (Ps 127:5). Truly I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ (Phil 1:23), by whose death death was destroyed, and I trust that I shall pass from death to life. And if I have laboured at all for you, if I have borne any fruit at all, however small, for the Church, I ask you to repay me with this kindness: that after my death you remember me there where every day Christ is priest and sacrifice of propitiation." The tenderness of the brethren's hearts, so moved, could no longer hold back its tears, which the greatness of joy on the one side, and of sorrow on the other, drew forth. For they rejoiced that they had nurtured one who was now to be borne into heaven; they grieved that in him they were to lose the light of the Church. But since faith never feels any loss, his departure is not to be mourned; rather, his dwelling with God, for whom all things live, is to be shared in joy.

Meanwhile, as he joyfully awaited the hour of death, or rather the entrance into everlasting life, there remained something from the Scriptures on which the disciples needed to hear their master's judgement. When this had been received from him and written down, and the scribe said, "It is finished," he, all the more cheerful, rejoicing at

the word of completion, said: "You have spoken well and truly: it is finished." Without delay he bade them lay him on the floor of his little cell, where he had been used to write, dictate, read and teach; and there, with his head raised a little, he was laid on his back by the hands of his own, so that, facing the oratory where he had been wont to pray in secret, and the sight of which delighted him even now, he might worship towards your holy temple, and give praise to your name, O Lord (Ps 138:2). Preparing himself thus for the heavenly journey, and thirsting to come to God, the living fountain, he said: My heart has said to you, O Lord: I have sought your face; your face, O Lord, will I seek; turn not your face away from me (Ps 27:8–9), on which the angels long to look (1 Pet 1:12).

And now the festal day of that solemnity was at hand, on which our Head and Beginning went before us into heaven, so that the members of his faithful might follow him there; and as the blessed man gazed on Jesus as though already ascending, he sighed with his whole being to follow him, and, with his soul already panting in his hands, he stretched out his hands in praise of the ascension of that same Jesus Christ, and, soon to ascend himself, cried out: "O King of glory, Lord of hosts, who this day ascended in triumph above all the heavens, do not leave us orphans, but send upon us the promise of the Father, the Spirit of truth. Alleluia." And when he had added the praise of the holy and undivided Trinity, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy

Spirit", at the naming of the Holy Spirit his own spirit was loosed from the flesh, and straightway it was borne into heaven in the blessed company of the holy spirits; where, joining his songs to the hymns of the heavenly Jerusalem, he praises for ever in bliss the King of the ages, the God of hosts, one in substance and three in persons.

When the Venerable Bede, pillar and doctor of the Church, had thus entered on the way of the Fathers, the devout piety of the brethren, lamenting with tears the fall of our mortal condition and witnessing to its joy in the hope of the resurrection, duly celebrated his funeral rites with psalms resounding on every side, and solemnly committed to burial the body of one who was at once their foster son and their teacher. His falling asleep in everlasting peace took place in the reign of Ceolwulf, in the seven hundred and thirty-fifth year of the Lord's incarnation and the fifty-ninth of his own age, which is the hundred and first year since the Church of Christ was first founded and established in the province of the Bernicians through a most illustrious and most holy king and bishop — I mean Oswald and Aidan; and that Church lives and rejoices to this day in the catholic faith, with God the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, as its author and ruler, whom, living and reigning with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever, every spirit praises and adores as Lord.