

**Homily for Ninian, Bishop in Galloway, c. 430,  
and Edward Bouverie Pusey, 1182**

**September 16, 2020**

**By the Reverend Stephen Gerth**

*Ezekiel 34:11–16; Psalm 106:1–5; Matthew 13:44–52*

The only reliable source we have for Saint Ninian’s life is the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, written about the year 731 by the Venerable Bede, an extraordinary scholar-monk. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* says that he was a careful writer. He named his sources and made an effort to separate fact from “hearsay and tradition”<sup>1</sup>—with respect, I would say fact from fiction.

From Bede, we learn that Ninian was the son of a converted chieftain in Cumbria. Cumbria is, roughly speaking, the region along the west coast of Britain where modern northeast England meets modern southwest Scotland. He spoke a dialect of Celtic.

The Oxford Dictionary gives circa 360 as the year of Ninian’s birth and circa 432 for his death. He was sent to Rome as a youth. We know he was ordained bishop in Rome in the year 394 and sent back to the region of

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<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (ODCC) 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. “Bede, St.,” 149–50.

his birth. He and the monks who accompanied him were missionaries to Scotland.

He knew Rome before its sacking by the Visigoths in the year 410. Ninian would have traveled on Roman roads and bridges for most of his journey. The year 410 was also the year that Roman troops withdrew from Britain. Civilization was collapsing.<sup>2</sup> In the Middle Ages, Ninian's tomb became a place of pilgrimage. It was a casualty of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland.<sup>3</sup>

Edward Bouverie Pusey was born in 1800. His father was the younger son of a viscount, his mother the daughter of an earl. He was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford. He became a fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, when he was 23. He studied went to Göttingen and Berlin for critical Biblical study. Pusey learned Hebrew, Arabic, and other Semitic languages. And he was a noted patristics scholar.

In 1828, he was ordained, married, and made Regius Professor of Hebrew and canon of Christ Church Cathedral, positions he would hold until his death on

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<sup>2</sup> Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 87–121.

<sup>3</sup> ODCC, s.v. "Ninian, St.," 977.

September 16, 1882. He and his wife had three children. She was only 38 when she died in 1839. He did not remarry.

Pusey became a part of the Oxford fellows and students who began what we know as the Oxford Movement, the revival of Catholic tradition in the Church of England. This movement would reshape the high church tradition that had lived within the Church since the Reformation.

In 1833, this group began to publish a series of short papers called *Tracts for the Times*, to advocate for the revival. The first tract was *Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission*<sup>4</sup> by John Henry Newman. Pusey would be the author of Tract Number 18, *Thoughts n the Benefits of the System of Fasting, Enjoined by our Church*.<sup>5</sup>

Pusey was an important preacher in an era when sermons were never short. In 1843, his sermon, “The Holy Eucharist, a Comfort to the Penitent,” was condemned, and he was banned from preaching for two years. However, the sermon was widely printed and helped to renew awareness of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist among Anglicans. With

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<sup>4</sup> <http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract1.html>, (accessed 16 September 2020).

<sup>5</sup> <http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract18.html>, (accessed 16 September 2020).

Pusey's 1846 sermon, "The Entire Absolution of the Penitent," the revival of the practice of private confession among Anglicans is dated. It's worth noting that when John Henry Newman became a Roman Catholic in 1845, Pusey remained faithful. He was, in what became a common phrase, "a Prayer Book Catholic." We at Saint Mary's owe a great deal to his work and his devotion to the Sacraments and Sacramental Rites of the Church.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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