

Mary, our Lady of Faith



Our Lady of Faith is not a common title of the Blessed Virgin Mary in England, but in several places just across the channel in Belgium and France, and then having spread from there to other places throughout the world, this is a very tender designation of our Lady.

The title originally goes back to the discovery of a terracotta statue of Our Lady and Child hidden deep in an oak tree which was felled in 1609 between the Belgian city of Dinant and the nearby village of Foy. It seems that the statue had originally been placed on the outside of the tree which had subsequently grown around it.

Following the discovery of the statue which was first of all replaced in a niche in a neighbouring oak tree people began to visit, pray and experience various gifts of grace, including some miraculous healings. In due course the statue was moved first to the chapel of the local Castle and then to a special sanctuary built on the site of the original oak. The church of Notre-Dame-de-Foy is still a pilgrimage centre today. This is in the French-speaking part of Belgium where “foy” is an old spelling of the word “foi” (faith)

From quite an early date copies of the statue were made and these too became focuses of devotion where they were set up, most notably in Amiens, where Our Lady of Faith has a special commemoration on 29 April.

It does of course feel very appropriate that the cell of our Lady of Walsingham centred on the parish church of St Faith in Havant, but with members from other parishes too, should place itself under the patronage of Our Lady of Faith. It is no disrespect to St Faith to play a little on the ambiguity of her name.

Mary is in a real sense the first disciple of Jesus Christ. When she received the message of the angel and accepted it in faith she became the model for every Christian. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word.” This was beautifully echoed by her cousin Elizabeth (the mother of St John Baptist), who declared, “Blessed is she who believed that the things said to her by the Lord would be fulfilled.” Mary is blessed because she received the word of God and cherished it. She is rightly said to have conceived in her heart before she conceived in her womb.

I hope that choosing “The Cell of Mary, Our Lady of Faith” as the title of our local cell may be a constant reminder to us all that being a Christian means nothing at all if it is not a matter of following the example of Mary and her answer to the angel, “be it unto me according to thy word.”