

3: ANIMAL STORIES - SCRIPTURE AND SAINTS – Activity 9

St Cuthbert's otter cupcakes

Equipment: Cupcakes (pre-made/bought unless you have lots of time, and ideally chocolate), chocolate icing, white and milk chocolate buttons, teaspoons and paper cases or plates.

Activity: Ice the cupcakes and use the chocolate buttons to make otter faces, with the white ones as eyes and the milk ones sticking up as eyes. If you are ambitious/artistic/brave you could even have some squeeze icing on hand to add pupils for the eyes and whiskers.

Purpose/teaching: One of the stories told about St Cuthbert is that he often went in secret to pray at during the night, standing in the cold north-sea. Cuthbert was a monk, and one of his brothers became curious about what he was up to. One day he followed Cuthbert and watched him until dawn. When Cuthbert finally got out of the water, some sea-otters came to him, rubbing their bodies against the saint to dry and warm his frozen feet.

Unlike many stories in lives of ancient saints, this one is easy for modern audiences to take seriously. Whether their motive would have actually been to dry Cuthbert rather than to play with him is a bit doubtful, but otters are curious, intelligent creatures and might well develop an interest in someone who came to the same spot night after night, and posed no threat to them. Cuthbert was well known for his care for animals, and forbade anyone from harming the birds on the Inner Farne Island when he moved there. He is an example of a serious and holy man who showed consistent compassion for animals, and developed a trusting and mutually rewarding relationship with them.

Taken at one level of course, the story makes a nice point about animals being capable of beings agents of God. It also has an exciting and positive modern post-script. After suffering from pollution, hunting and other forms of human interference the UK otter population is now growing again. Otter tracks have even been spotted on the Farne Islands once again for the first time in centuries.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/wildlife/3490247/Otter-appears-in-Farne-Islands-for-the-first-time.html>

So by following St Cuthbert's example of caring for wildlife, which can make a real difference, and sad stories can have happy endings. If things can begin to turn around for otters, then can change for other creatures currently suffering from selfish human behaviour.

