

Reflection Monday Week 13 St John Southworth 2022

The feast of St John Southworth (1592? - 1654) one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales, is kept on the anniversary of his execution in Westminster Diocese. He was the only English martyr to suffer under a dictatorship. After the English Civil War, the King was executed, the Elizabethan Prayer-Book outlawed and freedom of conscience proclaimed. But Catholics, accused of plotting against the King, were still persecuted when there was no King; fined for refusing to accept the Prayer-Book, they were still persecuted when there was no Prayer-Book. They asked for freedom of conscience for themselves and their countrymen but it was given to everyone but them. Priests went about in secret, in fear of betrayal and death. John Southworth was ordained priest at the English College at Douai in 1618. After returning to England, he was arrested in Lancashire in 1627 and condemned to death, but the sentence was commuted to imprisonment. In 1630 he was handed over, with several other priests, to the French Ambassador for transportation abroad. Whether he actually went or not seems uncertain, but he was certainly in England in 1637, when Westminster was devastated by the plague. He was seen visiting an infected house and, since there was only one reason to visit the sick under such dangerous circumstances, he was arrested and charged with being a priest. On that occasion the authorities quietly set him free and he disappeared once more. Seventeen years later, in 1654, he was arrested again. At his trial, he could have pleaded Not Guilty to the criminal and capital charge of being a priest – most missionaries did, causing much trouble to the persecutors. But Southworth did not. If he had pleaded Not Guilty, the court might have acquitted him; as it was, the judge wept as he passed sentence. He would have saved his life but he would have been denied the glory of solidarity with all the other English martyrs. The body of John Southworth was bought from the executioner by the Spanish Ambassador, who returned it to Douai for burial. During the French Revolution, he was re-buried in an unmarked grave for protection. The grave was rediscovered in 1927 and the body returned to England – the only complete remains of any of the English martyrs. Upon Southworth's beatification in 1929, his relics were enshrined in London's Catholic cathedral in Westminster. Although the penal laws remained in force, it is possible that an innocent man being cruelly killed discouraged their application. 24 years passed before the next priest was martyred. May the prayers of all martyrs win true liberty for us all.

Why shouldn't you write with a broken pencil? Because it's pointless.

Where can you buy chicken broth in bulk? The stock market.