

Reflection Thursday 4th Week Easter The English Martyrs 2023

On 4th May 1535, at Tyburn in London, three Carthusian monks were the first of many martyrs of the English Reformation. Of these martyrs, forty-two have been canonized, and 242 have been declared Blessed; but the true number of those who died on the scaffold, perished in prison, or were tortured or persecuted for their faith cannot now be reckoned. The persecution lasted 150 years and left a permanent mark on English culture: to this day Catholics continue to suffer certain minor disabilities under English law.

The martyrs celebrated today came from every walk of life. There were rich and poor; married and single; men and women. They are remembered for the example they gave of constancy in their faith and courage in the face of persecution.

From 2001, there are also celebrated on this day the forty martyrs of England and Wales who were canonized on 25th October 1970 and formerly celebrated on that day. They include Saints Cuthbert Mayne, John Houghton, Edmund Campion, and Richard Gwynn, as well as Saints John Roberts and Ambrose Barlow from the Benedictine monastery of St Gregory at Douay (now at Downside Abbey in Somerset).

It is impossible to fully understand the debt we owe these martyrs who have helped keep the faith alive in this country. Nor should we forget that under Queen Mary many non-Catholic Christians were also put to death. Yet, Jesus always wanted us to be one family and, through prayer and sacrifice, that family unity in England is now very, very strong. We can only really show our appreciation to the martyrs by living our faith to the full, caring for the poor and the neglected, being a welcoming Church and working whole heartedly with Christians of other denominations who, after all, are our sisters and brothers in Christ!!