

Reflection Saturday 5th Week Easter the English Martyrs 2024

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

These martyrs came from every walk of life, 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, the forty martyrs of England and Wales canonised on 25th October 1970, were added to this feast. 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),

Pope Pauls VI said: The tragedy in the lives of these martyrs was that their honesty and loyalty came into conflict with their fidelity to God and the dictates of their conscience. Two truths especially were involved: the Holy Eucharist and the inalienable prerogatives of the successor of Peter who, by God's will, is the universal shepherd of Christ's Church. Faced with the choice of remaining steadfast in their faith and of dying for it, or of saving their lives by denying that faith, without a moment's hesitation and with a truly supernatural strength they stood for God and joyfully confronted martyrdom.

Such was the greatness of their spirit that many of them died with prayers on their lips for the country they loved, for the King or Queen, as well as those directly responsible for their capture, their sufferings, and the degradation and ignominy of their cruel deaths. Let us thank God who, in his providential goodness, saw fit to raise up these martyrs.