

Padley Pilgrimage 11 July 2010

I am very grateful to Bishop Rawsthorne and to Bishop McMahon for their invitation to join in this Hallam and Nottingham Diocesan Pilgrimage to this Padley chapel in honour of these much loved priest martyrs.

It is even more memorable as we hold this celebration at the end of the Year for Priests, called for by Pope Benedict as a time of prayer and encouragement for all priests. And we are often certainly in need of both encouragement and prayer.

This is the first time I have been to Padley. It's a lovely place, so full of resonance for the Catholic life of this area. This visit has meant that I have had a lot to learn, too!

The first sight I had of this Chapel was, of course, of this end, with its high cross so prominent against the sky, its upper windows signalling that the old gatehouse has become a chapel, the stern wall indicating the strength and resilience of faith, and the dovecote entrances, high up near the cross, reminding us of the welcome and warmth of the faith so constantly celebrated here.

You know the story of the Padley martyrs better than I do. They are close to your heart, just as, from my youth, some of the Lancashire martyrs have a special place in my heart. But I have loved learning more about this place: the thriving Padley Manor, with its fish-ponds and reservoir – for fresh fish was an important part of the diet of a medieval manor; the slow development of the crisis of the Reformation, moving through its different stages, until the momentous events of 1588.

This is a long way from London. And that has always been important. Indeed, for the first phase of the Reformation, little change in the way of life of the Catholic population occurred here. The bitter hostility to the Catholic faith was concentrated in only some parts of the country. After the break with Rome and the deaths of the first martyrs in the 1530's up to the 1580's, only sixty one laymen and priests suffered capital punishment and none in areas north of the Thames Valley. London was 'light years away', (as some would say it still is!). It was only with the passing of the new Acts of Parliament in the 1580's that the situation changed radically. In 1581, for example, it became high treason for anyone to reconcile an English person to the Catholic Faith, a duty a priest could hardly repudiate. In 1585 a statute made it high treason for a Jesuit or a seminary-trained priest to remain in, or enter, the Realm. The reasons were political as well as religious, but it was the religious consequences which shaped so many lives and deaths.

So, up to that point, life here had been reasonably peaceful for most Catholics, with their school in Tideswell and local priests. But it was not all undisturbed. The resident of this Padley Manor, John Fitzherbert, had been thrown into goal in 1559 for refusing to conform to required religious practice. He was later released and return to the Manor. But he was a marked man.

So it was not surprising, that when the Earl of Shrewsbury decided that he must act in accordance with some of the new laws, he came here on 12 July 1588 in order to arrest John Fitzherbert once again. But he also found two priests, Fr Nicholas Garlick

and Fr Robert Ludlum here, hiding in the chimney. They, too, were arrested along with other members of the household.

Before we move on to remember these martyrdoms, perhaps it is worth recording that a few months after this raid, arrests and executions, the same Earl of Shrewsbury wrote in a report that hardly a soul in nearby Hathersage had ever attended an Anglican service – and there is no record of anyone ever paying a fine. The martyrs, too, were buried with great decency and reverence by the people of Derby. These facts speak for themselves of the strength of the faith in these parts.

You know about these two martyr priests: Nicholas Garlick, the teacher from Tideswell who went to the seminary in Rheims for a year before being ordained a priest in 1882. He came to England on his mission in January 1883, but was arrested in London in 1885 and banished from the realm. Perhaps it tells us all we need to know about him that this exile lasted but two days, because he set out immediately to return to England to carry on where he had left off in his ministry as a priest. He continued in that dangerous ministry until 12 July 1588.

Robert Ludlum had a longer academic career in Oxford. He, too, went to the seminary in Rheims, for less than 12 months, before he was ordained in September 1881. He is known to have been ‘a mild man, did much good in the country, for that he did much travel and was well beloved.’ He was certainly ready to risk all for the sake of his priestly ministry to the Church and its people.

They were imprisoned in Derby Gaol, built on the most unhealthy situation possible so that it stank and bred corruption and despair. John Fitzherbert spent two years there, until his transfer to London, where he died in 8<sup>th</sup> November 1590. The two priests were not in prison for that long. In their cell they joined Fr Richard Simpson who became their companion in suffering and death, all three charged with the offence of being ‘Massing priests’. Also there was a women murderess. As these four awaited execution, the priests lead the woman to repentance: they reconciled her to God and she died professing her faith. A true priestly work!

We are told that Fr Nicholas chatted to people at the roadside as he was dragged to the place of his execution, St Mary’s Bridge, Derby. He was described as being ‘very bold’ when answering the charges in the court, speaking up for them all. Fr Robert is remembered for his last words, ‘Come blessed of the Lord’, words now inscribed in the window in the chapel here.

In life they served the Lord by their deeds. In death, they honoured their Master and gave witness to the trustworthiness of his promises. It is so right that we honour them today and praise God for the wonder of His grace in their lives.

Today we live in a different age. So we read this story afresh, not simply recreating its detail in an act of nostalgia, but in order to see again its deepest meaning.

Over the years and especially in recent decades of study and ecumenical dialogue, we have learned that in appreciating the courage and dedication to the faith of the martyrs, we also have to reach back beyond these complex and far-reaching events to a common heritage, shared by all the followers of Christ in this land. These martyrs

are our heroes. But so too is St Edward the Confessor, and at his tomb, on 17<sup>th</sup> September, the present Archbishop of Canterbury will kneel in prayer with Pope Benedict XVI. Despite our obvious differences, we have so much in common.

Recall, too, the words of Queen Elizabeth I when, in 1584, she declared that ‘never a Catholic should be troubled for religion, so long as they lived like good subjects’, a statement which shows how difficult the international situation was at that time, how complex the mix of the political and the religious, and the depth of suspicions that surrounded Catholics.

But now her successor, Queen Elizabeth II, on September 16<sup>th</sup>, will receive and welcome Pope Benedict XVI at the very start of his remarkable State Papal Visit.

That meeting will set the scene for the Visit which is an expression of the Holy Father’s overall world-wide mission: that of helping people to see that faith in God is not a problem to be solved, but a gift to be discovered afresh. Now that is something everyone can understand, especially when we think of those voices in our society which insistently declare that faith in God is no more than a problem, a nuisance, something to be pushed to one side, and preferably kept out of sight. Yet here is the Pope, inviting everyone to see that faith in God, the faith that brought these martyrs cheerfully to their deaths, is a great gift. Faith is a gift which brings stability to our lives precisely by opening us to the adventure of knowing and loving God; a gift that brings sound principles and values for our actions by maturing our freedom so that it is used in service of others; a gift that brings hope even to the darkest moments of our human mystery; a gift that brings forgiveness in a world that sometimes loses its soul in the bitterness of conflict and jealousies.

Today we must promise our full support to Pope Benedict, as our country is privileged to receive him, standing with him in this delicate yet important mission.

This Year for Priests has been rich in blessings and heroes. We have had before our eyes St John Vianney, the holy Cure of Ars, who witnesses to the simplicity and dedication of the life of the priest. And we have Cardinal John Henry Newman, for thirty years a parish priest in Birmingham, much loved by his people for his pastoral care, his visiting of the sick and the imprisoned as well as for his erudition. On September 19<sup>th</sup>, the priests of this country will have a new role model – an English parish priest declared Blessed by Pope Benedict XVI.

How these martyrs of ours will smile in heaven as they witness these remarkable moments! How they will rejoice to see the Catholic faith being freely manifested in this their land. How they will pray that this faith will bear its essential fruit in action, in actions of charity, of justice, of forgiveness, in the overcoming of all hatred and prejudice and in the warmth of the offer it makes that all may come to know the Lord in his gentle mercy and goodness.

May the martyrs pray for us. May the Lord bless us and all who seek to follow him in sincerity of heart. May He bless our land and guide us in all we do. Amen.

+Vincent Nichols  
Archbishop of Westminster

