

Blessed Edward Bamber Mass, 14 July 2015

(Eccl. 51:1-8; Luke 9:23-26)



It is now 369 years since the martyrdom of Edward Bamber in Lancaster; his memory lives on and remains fresh in our faith-memory. Bl. Edward Bamber is our own very local Carleton martyr and belongs to that distinguished band of Lancashire martyrs who, though loyal to the Crown, were not prepared to compromise their Catholic faith. He studied at St. Omer, France and afterwards at St. Gregory's seminary, Seville, where he was ordained priest. As we know, he was eventually imprisoned and was put to death in Lancaster on 7th August 1646, together with Blessed Thomas Whitaker and Blessed John Woodcock. The mode of execution was to be 'hanged, drawn and quartered', a phrase which slips easily off the tongue but should not disguise the utterly cruel and horrific manner of this kind of death.

I was one of the invited guests recently when the Queen visited Lancaster Castle. Although it is no longer a prison, the building remains a grim and forbidding place. I dread to think what conditions were like there in Blessed Edward Bamber's day. Our first reading this evening from Sirach is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for deliverance in time of persecution and adversity. The faith and courage of Blessed Edward and his companions must have been rock-like as they endured imprisonment and waited for execution. Their life and death reflected the strange paradox of the gospel: *for whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel, he will save it.* (Luke 9: 24).

Our Mass this evening is an occasion once more to thank God for the life and heroic witness of Bl. Edward Bamber, underpinned by a steadfast faith in the truth of the Catholic Church as founded by Christ, the Son of God. He did not choose the times in which he lived, but did not shrink from the challenges of being a Catholic and a priest. He could have chosen an easier and certainly safer way of life by remaining on the continent and out of danger, but the call to minister to his own people and here in Lancashire was too strong to resist. His distinguished memory lives on among us!

Bl. Edward Bamber continues to speak to us and inspire us over the three and a half centuries since his martyrdom. The Church and diocese of Lancaster have, like him, their own challenges to confront and overcome. We are faced today with the temptation to be lukewarm in our faith. Recent generations do not appear to treasure the Mass as Blessed Edward and his companions did. It is easy to go with the tide and be slightly embarrassed about being identified as a practising Catholic. Blessed Edward would remind us that being a Catholic has never been easy, and to carry the cross after Christ can be counter-cultural. We probably will not be called to martyrdom, but we are called to be faithful to our Catholic inheritance. May the prayers of Edward Bamber and his martyr companions never fail us and assist us on our way. Amen!

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Bishop of Lancaster