

ST. JOHN LLOYD PARISH
CELEBRATION OF THE GOLDEN JUBILEE OF FOUNDATION
FEAST OF THE 40 MARTYRS OF ENGLAND AND WALES
25 OCTOBER 2016
ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK

Forty six years ago today I was in St. Peter's Rome for the Canonisation of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales by Pope Paul VI. One of those martyrs was St. John Lloyd, one of the last Catholic priests to have been executed for doing what we are doing this evening – offering Mass and celebrating the Sacraments.

Of course, there was more to the story than that. In 1665 there had been a great plague in London. The people thought that God was punishing them for their sins. In 1666 (note the devil's number: 666) the Great Fire of London had destroyed much of the capital. Somebody had to be blamed. It must have been those Catholics who were plotting a revolution. King Charles II had married a Catholic princess. Spain was going to try to invade this country again. The Pope would be in control of Protestant Great Britain. One writer said: *"At Coventry, the townspeople were possessed by the idea that the Papists (that's us) were going to cut everybody's throats"*. The reaction to all this? Let's find some scapegoats. Let's root out the priests who had been working quietly serving the Catholic people for years. Let's make an example of them. Find them guilty of treason, then take them to Gallows Field (junction of City Road and Richmond Road in Roath) and hang them. When they were nearly dead, draw

out their entrails and then quarter their bodies. That is what happened to traitors. That is what happened to John Lloyd who had been born in 1630, studied in Spain in the same college as Canon Peter Collins and Fr. Allan Davies-Hale, and was ordained a priest in 1653. He worked in South Glamorgan and Monmouthshire for over twenty years. He was martyred in 1679.

Why do I give you that magical mystery tour of 17th century British history? Because in the 17th century it was the Catholics. In the 20th century it was the Jews. And, dare I say, in the 21st century it is the Muslims. Dangerous. Subversive. Threateneing. Taking over. Must be removed.

When Pope Paul proclaimed St. John Lloyd a saint in 1970 , he said of him and all the English and Welsh martyrs:

“We admire them not just because of their fearless faith and marvellous constancy, but by reason of their humility, simplicity and serenity and above all the spiritual joy and that wondrously radiant love with which they accepted their condemnation and death”.

Like St. Thomas More before them, the English and Welsh martyrs were able to distinguish between religious and political loyalty. They all prayed for the king before they died. It was Thomas More who had said: *“I die the king’s good servant, but God’s first”.*

It is no accident that when these new parishes were established in Cardiff fifty years ago, Archbishop Murphy chose St. John Lloyd and St. Philip Evans as their patrons. Because in their dedicated service and heroic witness these priests nurtured the faith of an oppressed and persecuted people. We often say that “... the blood of the

martyrs is the seedbed of the Church". And there is no doubt that their memory lives on as does their heroic example. That is all part of our heritage and our memory, and why it is important to keep telling the story.

The whole purpose of these churches, schools and parishes is that we go on telling the story of another death, and a resurrection, and the new life which Jesus gives us. We don't just tell the story, but we live it - not least in being fed and nourished by his body and blood in Holy Communion. "Do this in memory of me". On a Golden Jubilee of course we look back and give thanks for what has gone before, those people who have enabled this parish to be built and grow and develop. They have told the story of their lives and faith. It is recorded in the Baptismal registers, the Confirmation registers, the marriage registers, and the book of funerals. But now we must tell our story. What do we want to pass on to future generations? How do we see the Church in this place in ten, twenty or thirty years time?

I love the saying which goes "our children are the messages we send to tomorrow". How good it is to have the pupils of St. John Lloyd Primary school with us tonight. Over the weekend, I was in Aberfan. The parents who lost children were not able to send messages to the future. That is why our homes and our schools are such precious places to nurture and educate and love our children. To make them aware, not so much by what we say but by what we do and who we are that we are offering them a precious gift which brings all sorts of joys and hopes, responsibility too. Not just selfishness. Not just my career and my future, but the future of the whole community, which is as strong as its weakest link. At a celebration like this we give

thanks for what we have received from those who have gone before. And we hand on to the next generation the treasures and the values which we hold dear so that they may build on what we have preserved for them and for their future.

Pope Francis recently spoke to a group of Religious Sisters at the end of the year devoted to Consecrated Life. He said:

Look at the past with gratitude.

Live the present with passion.

Embrace the future with hope.

I think that is good advice for us as we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of this parish of St. John Lloyd tonight.