

Our Patron Saint

St Oliver Plunkett (1625 - 1681)

Oliver Plunkett was born in Ireland in 1625. At that time, Catholics were persecuted for their faith and many were evicted from their homes and forbidden from attending mass. Priests, themselves, were hunted down and particularly punished if they were caught. Many priests fled to Rome to study for the priesthood.

Oliver went to Rome and was ordained in 1654 as a priest and then later, in 1669, as the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland. On his return to Ireland, Archbishop Plunkett established himself as a man of peace and set about visiting his people, establishing schools, ordaining priests and confirming thousands of lay people. During this time, he made many enemies, one of whom later gave evidence at his trial.

In 1673, with a renewal of religious persecution, bishops were banned once again and Archbishop Plunkett went into hiding and suffered a great deal. His letters revealed a determination not to abandon his people but to remain a faithful shepherd. The oppression eventually eased and for a short time, he was able to move amongst his people more freely, once again.

In 1679, Archbishop Plunkett was arrested and falsely charged with treason. This man of peace was accused of plotting to bring 20 000 French soldiers to Ireland. He was taken to London to stand trial and because he was not given time to arrange his defence. Archbishop Plunkett was found guilty and sentenced to death. The presiding judge said that at the basis of his treason charge was the setting up of a false religion, which was a crime against God.

Archbishop Plunkett, accepted his fate, refusing to give false evidence against his brother Irish bishops and publicly forgave all those responsible for his impending death. With a deep serenity of soul, he was executed in London on July 1st, 1681. In 1920, Oliver Plunkett was declared a martyr for the faith and was canonised on 12th October, 1975. His feast day is July 11th.

(Acknowledgement: Catholic Online)

