

It's no accident, perhaps, that today has been chosen to commemorate both the martyrs who gave their lives in penal times in England, the first on this date in 1535, and those very many victims of abuse, sexual and otherwise, by priests and religious, whose cases have now come to light. The commemorations may seem, at first, poles apart, one earning religious faith approbation and the other earning Christian faith nothing but condemnation. But there is a link in that, in each case, it is power that is also being abused and power at the service of untruth, and this should warn us that there are much deeper forces at issue here and all of this can happen again, indeed, is still happening when power subverts truth.

The first English martyrs died today because they refused to take the oath of supremacy, King Henry VIII's attempt to free himself of Papal jurisdiction. And the many victims of sexual abuse within the Church, of all denominations, found themselves at the mercy of predatory individuals with an almost schizophrenic divide within themselves between truth and power. So the deeper issue at play is how any institution, whether of Church or State, can exercise power truly; that is, without misleading and abusing the people it has been called to serve. The temptation to subvert the truth is very powerful now, in both our own government and still, sadly, within the Church. Just note how vicious was the attack on Cardinal Bell by another Cardinal seeking to cover up the vast financial irregularities within the Vatican Bank and just note how our present Prime Minister finds popular appeal even when lying through his teeth. So this is not a problem that has gone away and today serves as a sharp reminder that to speak truth to power is costly, but must be done.

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