

The Diocese of Northampton has recently produced a Supplement of Saints and Beati associated with the Diocese – it makes for sombre reading especially with those martyred post- reformation – those hung drawn and quartered at Tyburn . But also an encouragement, for many could have avoided this fate but chose not to. There was something going on in their lives which made even this terrible death bearable – they had a larger vision, a greater hope, something or someone sustaining them, so that some were recognised even in their own day as saints, holy men and women who were a blessing to others. It was just such a spirit that the readings we hear today were encouraging in the people of their day; endurance in time of trial, hope in times of persecution, faith in God even in God’s apparent absence, love when love was being supplanted by hatred as the norm. We may think these times are distant but the dynamic they point to has always been with us – the martyred saints of all periods of history are witness to this – the battle within ourselves writ large between good and evil, only varying in intensity as the temptations of each day come and go. So the witness they offer is about our daily bread – as we hear soon after the Beatitudes in the teaching of the Lords prayer, the prayer we dare to address to God as Our Father, the recognition and hope that we are or may be, children of God. It’s a naive prayer in one sense because it strips away all pretence of independence, of being able to stand against or without God, or one another. It’s both a statement of faith and a hope that we may fulfil the faith that God has in us as God’s children. It’s a relationship we have in a sense to suffer but which also brings us great joy “How happy are the poor in spirit. Happy the gentle .and so on”. Beatitudes , blessings, beatification – the recognition of someone as in a state of happiness – even in death . This is happiness not engendered by us but within the gift of another or better, intrinsic to a relationship which cannot fail – we cannot unmake God as father, as creator, as source of all we are. This is the larger vision the Saints we celebrate today enjoyed in their own day and continue to enjoy today, it’s a witness at its sharpest, at its most intense, in those physically martyred for their faith and here they are, the twelve such recognised in the Diocesan Supplement of Saints and Beati:

Saint Alnoth died at Stowe 700

Blessed Thomas Alfield hanged at Tyburn 1585

Saint Thomas Beckett murdered at Canterbury 1170

Blessed Thomas Belson executed at Oxford 1589

Blessed William Browne executed at Ripon 1605

Saint Cadoc martyred near Weedon Northants c580

Blessed Robert Drury executed at Tyburn 1607

Blessed Everard Hanse executed at Tyburn 1581

Blessed Richard Langhorne also Tyburn 1679

Blessed Richard Newport, hung, drawn and quartered Tyburn 1612

Saint Ragener killed in the Viking persecution 870, buried in St Peters Northampton

Blessed Peter Wright executed Tyburn 1651

This is of course skewed in favour of the male line - the red martyrs as opposed to the white – the many other martyrs who bear witness to the love of God, martyrs we now recognise even among those we once thought of as enemies and some indeed living today. The final list to be found in heaven – I suspect we’re in for some surprises.