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Prayer to St. Oliver

Glorious Martyr, St. Oliver,
who willingly gave your life for your faith,
help us also to be strong in faith.

May we be loyal like you to the see of Peter.
By your intercession and example
may all hatred and bitterness
be banished from the hearts of Irish men and women.

May the peace of Christ reign in our hearts,
as it did in your heart,
even at the moment of your death.
Pray for us and for Ireland. Amen.

The above prayer has been promoted widely in recent years and many people recite it daily for the intention of Peace and Reconciliation in Ireland.

Armagh Diocesan Prayer to St. Oliver

Oliver, Saint and Hero,
You followed the way of Jesus and stood up for what you believed in.
We honour your memory.

Guide the Church of Armagh
As we engage with the challenges of our time.
Direct our energies in ways that nurture faith in
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Walk with us on the pilgrim path,
Which involves renewal and change.
Help us to trust in Jesus as leader and teacher.

May we value all that is sacred
And embrace courageously ways of peace
And reconciliation. Amen

St. Oliver Plunkett pray for us.

Hymn to St. Oliver: Shorter version: verses 1, 2 & 6.

1 Come glorious martyr, rise
Into the golden skies,
Beyond the sun!
Wide, wide the portals fling
And martyr hosts, O sing
To greet his entering
“Well hast thou done”.

2 Never reproach he made,
Like to his Lord betrayed
By his own kind.
Sharing his Masters blame,
Gladly he bore the shame,
While the false charge they frame,
“Guilty” they find.

3 As coach of state he hails,
Hurdle of shame and trails
All rough way through London streets, he goes,
Heedless of lesser woes,
Tyburn holds greater throes,
Ready that day.

4 Blood stained the path he trod,
Leading him onto God,
Counting no the cost,
Now for my faith I die,
Said he in glad reply,
O for my God I sigh, All fear is lost.

5 Lord in thy hands, he prays
My soul for-ever stays,
Strengthen thou me.
Welcome, o rope and knife!
All those who made this strife
I now forgive, my life offer to thee.

6 Hail then, great martyr, hail,
In death thou did prevail
Winning renown!
Blow the full trumpets, blow,
Wider the portals throw,
Martyr triumphant go
Where waits your crown.

Mass of Saint Oliver Plunkett (Feast 1st July)

Entrance Antiphon:

Here is a True Martyr who shed his blood for Christ; his judges could not shake him by their menaces, and so, he won through to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Opening Prayer:

God our Father, you filled St. Oliver with your Spirit of fortitude, enabling him to feed your flock with his word and lay down his life for his sheep. Help us by his prayers to keep the faith he taught, and to follow the way of reconciliation, which he showed by his example. Grant this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

1st Reading: A reading from the prophet Ezekiel: 34: 11-16.

For the Lord God says this: I am going to look after my flock myself and keep all of it in view. As a shepherd keeps all his flock in view when he stands up in the middle of his scattered sheep, so shall I keep my sheep in view. I shall rescue them from wherever they have been scattered during the mist and darkness. I shall bring them out of the countries where they are; I shall gather them together from foreign countries and bring them back to their own land. I shall pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in every inhabited place in the land. I shall feed them in good pasturage; the high mountains of Israel will be their grazing ground. There they will rest in good grazing ground; they will browse on rich pastures on the mountains of Israel. I myself will pasture my sheep, I myself will show them where to rest – it is the Lord who speaks, I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray, bandage the wounded and make the weak strong. I shall watch over the fat and healthy. I shall be a true shepherd to them. This is the word of the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm: Response: The Lord Guides and Protects us.

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose. Near restful waters he leads me, to revive my drooping spirit. **(R)** He guides me along the right path; he is true to his name. If I should walk in the valley of darkness no evil would I fear. You are there with your crook and your staff; with these you give me comfort. **(R)** You have prepared a banquet for me, in the sight of my foes. My head you have anointed with oil; my cup is overflowing. **(R)** Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life. In the Lord's own house shall I dwell for ever and ever. **(R)**

2nd Reading: A reading from the 1st letter of St. Peter: 3: 8-18.

Finally: you should all agree among yourselves and be sympathetic; love the brothers, have compassion and be self-effacing. Never pay back one wrong with another, or an angry word with another one; instead, pay back with a blessing. That is what you are called to do, so that you inherit a blessing yourself. Remember: anyone who wants to have a happy life and to enjoy prosperity must banish malice from his tongue, deceitful conversation from his lips; he must never yield to evil but must practice good; he must seek peace and pursue it. Because the face of the Lord frowns on evil men, but the eyes of the Lord are turned towards the virtuous. No one can hurt you if you are determined to do only what is right; if you do have to suffer for being good, you will count it a blessing: There is no need to be afraid or to worry about them. Simply reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have. But give it with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience, so that those who slander you when you are living a good life in Christ may be proved wrong in the accusations that they bring. And if it is the will of God that you should suffer, it is better to suffer for doing what is right than for doing wrong. Why Christ himself, innocent though he was, had died once for sins, died for the guilty, to lead us to God. In the body he was put to death, in the spirit he was raised to life. This is the word of the Lord.

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia; The sheep that belong to Me, listen to my voice, says the Lord, I know them and they follow Me. Alleluia

Gospel: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John: 10: 11-16.

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; this is because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and these I have to lead as well. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, and one shepherd.

General Intercessions: Introduction: My sisters and brothers, God our Father wants all people to be saved and calls us to the knowledge of the truth. Let us pray to him with all our hearts.

1: For Pope Benedict XVI, and all bishops, priests and religious, may they fearlessly and clearly teach the Catholic faith for which St. Oliver willingly gave his life. **Lord Hear Us.**

2: For all who govern us, may they guide us with justice and compassion, so that the dignity of all may be respected. **Lord Hear Us.**

3: For all Christians who have to suffer, for bearing witness to their faith. **Lord Hear Us.**

4: For peace and reconciliation in our own country and throughout our troubled world. May human hearts everywhere be set free from fear, hatred and violence, enabling the spirit and love of Christ to live in all hearts. **Lord Hear Us.**

5: For our young people, the future of our Church and of our world, that the example of St. Oliver may inspire them to lives of courageous faith. **Lord Hear Us.**

6: We pray for those who have died needlessly through violence, and for those who have died recently (N & N), and for (N & N), whose anniversaries occur. That they may have life without end.

Lord Hear Us.

Conclusion: Father, we come before you with faith and love to praise your goodness and to acknowledge our needs. We ask you to hear the prayers we make in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Prayer over the Gifts:

All powerful God, look upon the gifts we bring in honour of St. Oliver, may we who celebrate the mystery of the death of the Lord imitate the love we celebrate. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Preface:

Father, all-powerful and ever living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks. Your holy Martyr St. Oliver Plunkett, followed the example of Christ and gave his life for the glory of your name. His death reveals your power, shining through our human weakness. You choose the weak, and make them strong in bearing witness to you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. In our unending joy, we echo on earth the song of your angels in heaven as they praise your glory forever.

Communion Antiphon:

If anyone would be at my service, let them follow me; where I shall be, there will be my servant too.

Prayer after Communion:

Lord, Saint Oliver worked tirelessly for the faith, spending his life in its service. With the power this Eucharist gives, make your people strong in the same true faith, and help us proclaim it everywhere by all we say and do in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

Please recite this prayer at the end of Mass:

Prayer to St. Oliver Plunkett

Glorious Martyr, St. Oliver, who willingly gave your life for your faith, help us also to be strong in faith. May we be loyal like you to the See of Peter. By your intercession and example may all hatred and bitterness be banished from the hearts of Irish men and women. May the peace of Christ reign in our hearts, as it did in your heart, even at the moment of your death. Pray for us and for Ireland. Amen.

Thoughts for a Homily

Here in Ireland during these early years of the twenty-first century, we give thanks to God that the Irish peace process has been so successful to date and we pray through the intercession of St. Oliver that it may continue so. However, there is still much need for reconciliation in our midst and we pray that all traditions on the island of Ireland may be truly reconciled.

Sadly at this time, the Irish Church again finds itself in serious crisis, needing healing and reform as much as ever. St. Oliver, a man who showed forgiveness even to his enemies, a reformer, a leader, a teacher, a good shepherd, a preserver of the faith, a peacemaker, a man staunchly loyal to the Holy See and no stranger to all sorts of crisis, can teach us much by his example and intercession at this critical period for the Irish Church. So let us follow his example and invoke his intercession at this time, as he undoubtedly would wish us to do.

Two days after St. Oliver's canonisation in 1975, His Eminence Cardinal Manning, Archbishop of Los Angeles, preached in a sermon in Rome:

“Whenever some doctrine is proclaimed a dogma of faith, it is usually in order to counteract a heresy or because the doctrine has special relevance at the time of its definition.”

“In the same way, when saints are canonised, they are often felt to have a particular relevance to the era of their canonisation, they can serve as a means to overcome crises and to heal wounds in the Church. So it is with Oliver Plunkett.”

“St. Oliver is placed before us as a model for his loyalty to Rome and for his dedicated work on behalf of the Irish people. Loyalty to Rome is essential for the Church.”

“The martyr's dedication to duty, his courage in the face of death, his efforts to restore peace in his country at a time of troubles, all these have a special relevance to Ireland at the present time.”

The Irish Episcopal Conference issued a pastoral letter to mark the occasion of the canonisation, which included the following excerpts:

“We thank God for having given him to us to show us an example in these troubled times and to be our Patron in Heaven.”

“He travelled the country for ten years, often in disguise and sometimes barely ahead of his pursuers, until his capture and imprisonment put an end to his labours. During these ten years he had done as much as any man since St. Patrick to strengthen and preserve the faith in Ireland.”

“We ask him today for all the graces we need for ourselves and for our country. We ask that we may be as he was, steadfast, courageous and devout, untiring in our work for peace and reconciliation, loyal to the Church and firm in our faith even unto death. St Oliver Plunkett pray for us.”

Quotes of St. Oliver

“This is the time for doing good. We must follow the example of sailors at sea. When the wind is favourable, they unfurl their canvas and skim swiftly across the ocean under full sail; but when it turns against them, they lower their sails and take shelter in some little port. While we have the present Viceroy, we will sail, and I will do all in my power to advance our spiritual interests”. (*Written early in his apostolate*)

in Ireland, at a time when he met with remarkable success in his work; ie. the education and reform of the clergy, peace in the dioceses, peace in the province, meetings and synods for priests and bishops, Drogheda schools, re-establishing order and regularity in the Church and giving it hope for the future.)

“I found serious divisions in them, but by the grace of God, all is now quiet in the dioceses which I have visited”. *(Bringing peace to the Church.)*

“The province has not had greater peace in thirty years”. *(Bringing peace to the province, having brokered a peace agreement between the Government and the Raparees/Tories. We give thanks to God that we can now repeat those words of St. Oliver)*

“County Tyrone...all the Catholics in this county are leaseholders, not one gentleman possesses an inch of land” *(No Catholic churches were allowed across the province as all the land was under the control of non-Catholics. The mass-rock was in vogue and so Archbishop Oliver must have come to know most of the mass-rocks, which were dotted across the northern province.)*

“Apart from three, the nobles and gentry of the whole province of Ulster were deprived of their possessions, and from being landlords and proprietors have become leaseholders. They are unable to educate their children. The young priests ordained over the past seven years to fill the parishes vacated by the death of the older priests are very deficient in learning: they do not have schoolmasters fit to teach them, nor were Catholic masters tolerated, and thus even the sons of gentlemen deprived of learning and skill grew up to become rogues and highwaymen, and many of them were hanged...I called in the Jesuits into my diocese, I built for them from the foundations quite a comfortable house and two schools where they train up to one hundred and fifty boys and twenty five priests...I have supported for the past nine months two very learned and hard working fathers, a brother and a servant...I have kept them these nine months at my own expense, and have bought for them even the frying pan.” *(Setting up his school for young boys and a college for priests in Drogheda.)*

“The last two months were spent in making a difficult and tiring visitation of my diocese, of which I shall shortly give a full account to Your Excellency... The journey through the mountains of the northern districts were very fatiguing and it made the running of my eyes much worse so that I can hardly write or read letters, even if they are large as headlines, but there was no check on my tongue from preaching in both the English and Irish languages”. *(Showing determination despite hardship by unfurling full sail during the short periods of toleration he experienced.)*

“I shall not spare myself fatigue...I did not give repose to brain, pen or even horses these four years, in a vast province of eleven dioceses.” *(Undaunted by the fact that he was the only active bishop in the northern province for some time; he saddled his horse and travelled extensively across the broad expanse of the eleven dioceses under his care, an enterprise which would have been a real act of stamina for him.)*

“What Alps and Apennines I have crossed the Lord knows”. *(He appointed a new vicar to the diocese of Raphoe and it was he who accompanied him on the long journey to Donegal to show him the passes and to introduce him around the diocese.)*

“There are bearded men of sixty who have not yet received the sacrament of confirmation...It was not uncommon for the old and the infirm to be carried some distance to a mass-rock for confirmation ” *(Most dioceses had not seen the sight of a bishop in over a generation)*

“There is nothing which gives me greater interior pain however, than to see the schools established by me thrown down after such expense. O what will the Catholic youth do now, so numerous and so talented.” *(The Drogheda schools were demolished by the authorities in November 1673, after only three years and five months in existence)*

“I am exhorting the brethren to constancy and not to abandon their flocks, but to imitate the pastors of the first three centuries and withdraw to some corner of their districts until the storm passes. I shall retire to a hut in some wood or mountain in my diocese with some candles and books...We shall not abandon our flocks unless compelled to do so, we shall first try out the prisons and other torments, already we have suffered so much on the mountains, in huts and in caves, and have acquired the habit of suffering to the extent that it will be less inconvenient in the future...For if the captains fly, it is in vain to exhort the single soldiers to stand in battle”. (*A good shepherd, who did not run away, but who remained resolute in the face of persecution. The theme of the Mass of St. Oliver is that of the Good Shepherd*)

“Snow mixed with big hard hailstones was falling, a cutting wind was blowing into our faces and the snow and hail blew so strongly into our eyes and affected them so much that we are hardly able to use them even yet. Finally, after frequent danger of being suffocated by the snow in the valleys, we arrived at the house of a poor gentleman who had nothing to lose, but through bad fortune he had a stranger in the house, by whom we did not wish to be recognised, and so he put us in a fine room under the roof where we have remained without chimney or fire for eight days now, may it be for the glory of God and the good of our souls and of the flock committed to us.” (*On the run in south Armagh and elsewhere, with his colleague from Rome, Bishop John Brennan of Waterford and later of Cashel*)

“For months and months we were in attics without a fire...the poor Catholic leaseholders are reduced to penury and cannot give us even a piece of bread... Milk is unobtainable since all the cows have died.) (*Persecution and famine, 1674*)

“I have however two consolations, one is interior, namely that I suffer for a good cause, and this will have its result, so I hope in the Divine Mercy, an eternal reward. The second consolation is in my books, which enable me to say that I am never less alone than when alone, never less solitary than when solitary”. (*On the run, alone*)

“If I were a man that had not good principles, I might easily have saved my life; but I had rather die ten thousand deaths, than wrongfully take away one farthing of any mans goods, one day of his liberty, or one minute of his life”. (*Oliver’s words in Westminster hall before being condemned to death.*)

“I do heartily forgive them, and also the judges...I do also forgive all those who had a hand in bringing me from Ireland to be tried here, where it was morally impossible for me to obtain a fair trial...I ask forgiveness of all those whom I ever offended by thought word and deed”. (*Last speech, from the gallows at Tyburn. See also in Literature section*)

St. Oliver Timeline

1st November 1625: Born, Loughcrew, Oldcastle, Co. Meath.

1st January 1654: Ordained priest in Chapel of Propaganda College, Rome.

1st December 1669: 1st Sunday of Advent, Consecrated Archbishop of Armagh in Ghent.

1st July 1681: Martyred at Tyburn, London.

1st April 1958: Miraculous cure of Mrs Giovanna Martiriggiano in Naples. (*See also Canonisation Section*)

1st July: Feastday.

“Being the 1st among the Irish, with the grace of God I shall give good example to the others not to fear death”. Letter of 22nd June 1681.

Other dates:

6th December 1679: Arrested Dublin.

9th December 1886: Declared Venerable and the cause for beatification began.

17th March 1918: Declared Martyr on St. Patrick's Day.

23rd May 1920: Beatified in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome, on Pentecost Sunday.

12th October 1975: Canonised in St. Peter's Square, Rome, by Pope Paul VI. (*See also Canonisation Section*)

Deo Gratias for the life example and intercession of St. Oliver Plunkett