

29. November 2025
THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

**“San Cuthbert Mayne:
Martyr of Catholicism in Anglican England”**

A great tribulation befell the faithful of England and Wales when King Henry VIII broke away from the authority of Rome in 1531 and founded the so called “Church of England.” The situation worsened under the reign of Elizabeth I. Catholics were treated and persecuted as enemies of the state. With no Catholic bishops left, it was no longer possible to ordain Catholic priests. The Catholic Church, which had held a prominent position in England, seemed on the verge of extinction. However, God did not allow this to happen.

William Allen, a priest who had fled England, managed to found a seminary in Douai, France, to train priests who would be ordained and sent as missionaries to England. Their vocations had to be strong, as persecution and death awaited them in their homeland. William Allen himself wrote several books defending the true faith.

The first martyr of the Douai Seminary was today’s saint: Cuthbert Mayne. He had once been an Anglican minister, but he met some young men who convinced him of the Catholic faith, and he converted. Among them was Blessed Edmund Campion. An Anglican bishop ordered their arrest after one of the letters these young men wrote to Cuthbert fell into his hands. Cuthbert escaped the soldiers and fled to France, where he entered the Douai Seminary. There, he was ordained a priest and sent back to England.

He was given only a short time to work for the salvation of souls. Francis Tregian, a nobleman faithful to the Catholic faith, took him into his home. Cuthbert was presented to the outside world as his steward, but in secret he performed the more difficult task: that of steward in the Lord’s vineyard, covered with thorns. The following year, in 1577, the Anglican bishop made a pastoral visit to Cornwall. He learned from the county judge that Tregian’s house was a “nest of rebels and disobedient people” and that it probably harbored a priest. Immediately, several judges and a hundred armed men were sent to inspect Tregian’s house.

Finding an object of Catholic devotion in the clothes of St. Cuthbert, they arrested him as a “traitor and rebel.” In addition, a copy of Pope Gregory XIII’s 1575 jubilee bull was found among his books and writings, which, as Mayne later testified in court, had arrived in England by chance among his books. This bull and the object of devotion formed the basis of the indictment and subsequent conviction for “high treason.”

The dungeon in which the prisoner was confined was infested with filth and parasites. It was so dark that he could barely see his own hands, let alone read or write. Contrary to all justice and based solely on assumptions, Cuthbert was tried along with eleven or twelve of his acquaintances who had been arrested with him. Despite Mayne's argument in his defense that the bull had expired, he was found guilty of high treason against the queen and the kingdom for possessing it. When the sentence was handed down, condemning him to the barbaric punishment applied for high treason at the time, the saint listened with a serene and joyful expression. With his hands raised to the sky, he exclaimed, “Thank God!” The other defendants were stripped of their lands, fiefdoms, property, and flocks, and sentenced to life imprisonment simply because they could be shown to be absent from Anglican worship, were suspected of attending Holy Mass, and “were acquaintances of Mayne and were united by papism.”

On November 29, 1577, Cuthbert Mayne was executed according to the sentence, after having suffered severe torments. The saint remained steadfast. He was deeply convinced that the Catholic faith was the one true faith, and God endowed him with the spirit of fortitude. Thus, he was able to bear a radiant witness to the truth of Catholicism.

This martyr was executed by Christians who had severed their ties with the Holy Church and abandoned communion with her. His martyrdom exhorts us to value our Catholic faith and to defend it against all relativization and distortion. True unity in faith can only be achieved on the foundation of truth and charity. Any other apparent unity would be a deception.

Saint Cuthbert, pray for the true unity of the Church and help us to preserve the Catholic faith without sacrificing it for the sake of false unity.

Meditation on the Gospel of the Day: <https://en.elijamission.net/god-alone-is-the-true-hope-2/>