

**CWL National Pilgrimage Mass in honour of St. Margaret Clitherow
St. Wilfrid's Church, York on 30 August 2019**

Dear Sisters and dear friends of the CWL,

It is about fifty years since I was last in York. As a young priest, I came here with members of the Portsmouth CWL Section. I guess it would have been in preparation for the canonisation of St. Margaret Clitherow. That took place on 25 October 1970 as the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales were canonised.

What a privilege it is to be here again with all of you on this CWL National Pilgrimage on the very feast of your patron, St. Margaret Clitherow, in this lovely Oratorian Church of St. Wilfrid.

A pilgrimage is a significant moment for each one of us on our journey of faith, and what a focus St. Margaret Clitherow gives us today. This is how she spoke of her faith - "I ground my faith upon Jesus Christ, and by Him I steadfastly believe to be saved, as is taught in the Catholic Church throughout Christendom, Jesus who promised to remain with Her until the world's end, and hell gates shall not prevail against her."

Margaret Clitherow's commitment to Our Lord and his Church rings out in that quotation, a quotation that is so mature for someone who is only thirty and who had been a Catholic for about twelve years. And yet in those years she had harboured priests in her home and enabled them to celebrate Mass. A mother of three children and pregnant with her fourth child, she was arrested. She refused to plead in order to safeguard her children from questioning and possible torture. But the punishment for refusing to plead was the barbaric

death she underwent. With a stone placed under her back she lay on the bridge over the River Ouse. Then she was weighed down until her back broke and she died a martyr's death. Prior to her death she said, "The sheriffs have said that I am going to die this coming Friday and I feel the weakness of my faith which is troubled at this news but my spirit rejoices greatly. For the love of God pray for me and ask all good people to do likewise."

How apt are the words from the Book of Wisdom in our first reading - "The souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God. In the eyes of the world they did appear to die, their going looked like a disaster." How else could her husband and three children have felt at the death of a loving wife and mother. Yet, "their hope was rich with immortality." That must have been St. Margaret's hope. "They who trust in him will understand the truth, those who are faithful will live with him for ever. For grace and mercy await those he has chosen." Surely, that was confirmed in the Canonisation ceremony in 1970 and in this National CWL Pilgrimage!

But, while we celebrate the glory of God in the martyrdom of St. Margaret Clitherow, on this pilgrimage we must seek to imitate her faith and the acceptance of the cross and of suffering. For, as we heard Jesus say to us in the Gospel, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me."

When Jesus first mentioned the path of suffering that he would undergo, Peter had remonstrated with him. Peter wanted to follow Jesus but without the cross. At the first Mass Pope Francis celebrated after his election he said, "When we journey without the cross, when we build without the cross, when

we profess Christ without the cross, we are not disciples of the Lord, we are worldly but we are not disciples of Christ.” He was preaching to the Cardinals who had elected him, and he ended by saying, “My wish is that all of us may have the courage to walk in the presence of the Lord, with the Lord’s cross, to build the Church on the Lord’s blood which was poured out on the cross, and to profess the one glory, Christ crucified. And in this way, the Church will go forward.” That, of course, applies to all of us here who are baptised.

None of us looks for suffering, but it is there in our lives, in our families, in our communities, and in our world. With St. Margaret Clitherow we are invited to embrace suffering and unite that suffering with Christ’s cross and, therefore, with hope.

May this pilgrimage encourage each one of us to renounce ourselves freely, to take up our cross every day positively and to follow Jesus more closely.

Through the intercession of St. Margaret Clitherow may we see more clearly with the eyes of faith the path we must follow to bear witness to Jesus and his Church.

This is my second pilgrimage this week! Earlier in the week I was in Lourdes where I had the privilege of presiding and preaching at the Mass in the grotto. In this Year of St. Bernadette, I focussed on the encounters at the grotto between St. Bernadette and Our Lady, eighteen in all, as a result of which Bernadette eventually persuaded the local Church to build a chapel and to go in procession to the place of the apparitions.

Those encounters made me reflect on the moments of encounter in our lives, and Pope Francis' words about encounter, a culture close to his heart. Pope Francis sees the way we encounter one another as the work of Jesus, not just seeing but looking, not just hearing but listening, not just passing people by but stopping with them, not just saying, "What a shame, poor people", but allowing ourselves to be moved with compassion, to draw near, to make contact and to speak.

May our encounter with Christ in this Pilgrimage Mass and may our encounter with the faith and martyrdom of our Patron, St. Margaret Clitherow enrich our own faith and teach us to carry our cross and do the work of Jesus in the day to day encounters of our daily lives. St. Margaret Clitherow: pray for us.

+Peter Doyle
Bishop of Northampton