

# HEREFORDSHIRE: PRAYER, SAINTS & BLESSEDS

## Prayer for Herefordshire

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Heavenly Father,  
in Christ your son you have shown your glory to the world.  
Guide the work of your church in Herefordshire.  
Helped by the prayers of Our Lady,  
and our martyrs and saints,  
may we proclaim your name,  
persevere in the faith,  
and bring salvation to those who do not know you.  
We ask this through Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

**Our Lady, Queen of Martyrs:** Pray for us

**St Æthelbert and Saint Thomas of Hereford:** Pray for us

**St John Kemble and Martyrs of Herefordshire:** Pray for us.

*From the Yearbook for the Welsh Province.*

## May 4: The English Martyrs

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In England, the 40 canonized martyrs previously celebrated on 25 October are now included with the 85 Beatified Martyrs in a single celebration of “The English Martyrs” on this date, chosen because it marks the first Reformation martyrdom (three Carthusians at Tyburn in 1535). In Wales, the two celebrations remain distinct.

Two of the 85 beati have connections with Herefordshire:

- ❖ Roger Cadwallador (b. at Stretton Sugwas, near Hereford, in 1568; executed at Leominster, 27 August 1610) was an English Roman Catholic priest.
- ❖ Nicholas Wheeler, seminary priest from Herefordshire, executed at Tyburn 1586, aged 36.

## **May 20: St Æthelbert, Martyr**

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Æthelbert (d. 794) was King of the East Angles, at the time when England existed as seven kingdoms. Brought up in piety, he was a man of singular humility. Urged to marry, he declared his preference for a life of celibacy, but at length consented to woo Altrida (Alfrida), daughter of Offa, King of the Mercians. Offa had ambitions to be reign as overall King of England, which would have been thwarted by recognising Æthelbert as a king.

Æthelbert travelled from Bury St Edmunds to Offa's palace at Marden (about 4 miles north of what is now Hereford cathedral). Whether on his own initiative or at the behest of Cynethryth, the queen mother – there are different accounts, none contemporary with the events – Offa contrived to have Æthelbert beheaded.

The body was buried ignominiously, but, after the intervention of Pope Adrian, Offa was forced to build a church at Marden where the body was buried. Later, Æthelbert's body was taken to the cathedral at Hereford, where many miracles were attributed to its presence; his head was then enshrined at Westminster Abbey.

As a saint closely connected with Herefordshire, Æthelbert is a saint of the Archdiocese of Cardiff and therefore of the Welsh province.

## **August 23 (22): St John Kemble, Martyr**

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John Kemble (1599-1679) escaped England to study for the priesthood and was ordained a priest at Douai in Flanders in 1625. He returned to begin his apostolate in his home county, Herefordshire, establishing his headquarters at Pembridge Castle, which belonged to one of his relatives. For the next 53 years he served the Catholics of that district. The details of his quiet missionary work are not known, for it was still necessary for priests to keep the lowest possible profile.

Persecution of English Catholics was rekindled in 1678 in the wakes of the Titus Oates plot. That autumn, the police began arresting these alleged conspirators in Herefordshire, including David Lewis, who was eventually executed. Friends urged Father Kemble to take flight; the 80-year-old priest refused. "According to the course of nature," he said, "I have but a few years to live. It will be an advantage to suffer for my religion and, therefore, I will not abscond." The local police chief, Captain Scudamore, arrested Kemble and jailed him in Hereford City. After months of imprisonment, the priest was condemned to be hanged, drawn and quartered (that is, disembowelled alive and cut into four pieces). The charge was that he was a "seminary priest".

The date for the hanging was set for August 22, 1679. When the hour for execution arrived, Father John persuaded under-sheriff Digges to delay a bit until he had finished his prayers, smoked a pipe and had a drink. The governor and the under-sheriff not only consented, but joined Kemble in the smoke and the drink. Knowing that the Privy Council had failed to find any evidence of his involvement with the Oates plot, he declared "I die only for professing the Roman Catholic religion, which was the religion that first made this Kingdom Christian." Although the drawing and quartering was postponed until after Kemble was fully dead, the hangman so botched the execution that the aged man hung there a half-hour before he died.

John Kemble is one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales. As a saint closely connected with Herefordshire, he is a saint of the Archdiocese of Cardiff and therefore of the Welsh province. If kept as a Feast or Solemnity, his day is August 22, but this is impeded for votive celebrations by the Queenship of Mary, so he may instead be celebrated on August 23.

## **August 26: St David Lewis, Priest & Martyr**

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David Lewis had as great uncle Father Augustine Baker, the Benedictine author of 'Holy Wisdom'. He was reconciled to the Church at the age of twenty, studied for the priesthood at the Venerable English College, Rome, and subsequently entered the Society of Jesus. For thirty years he laboured on the Hereford-Monmouth border where he became known as Father of the Poor. He was taken during the national scare occasioned by the Titus Oates Plot, imprisoned at Monmouth and executed at Usk on August 27, 1679, the last of the Welsh martyrs.

His feast is a day earlier than his date of death, which coincides with St Monica's day.

## **October 3: St Thomas de Cantilupe, Bishop**

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Thomas de Cantilupe (1218-1282) was born of a noble family. He entered political service and became Lord High Chancellor under King Edward I. In 1275 he became Bishop of Hereford and was renowned for his ascetic life, strict discipline, pastoral zeal and administrative skill. But he was also feisty and this led to his downfall; in 1281 he entered into a dispute with the then Archbishop of Canterbury, and was excommunicated. In 1282, he set out to plead his case with Pope Martin IV, but died before returning to England. His bones were returned to Hereford; from 1287 onwards, many miracles occurred at his tomb. These were carefully recorded and, because of these and the persistence of his successor as bishop, Thomas de Cantilupe was proclaimed a saint in October 1320.

As a saint closely connected with Herefordshire, Thomas is a saint of the Archdiocese of Cardiff and therefore of the Welsh province.