

New Brighton, Sunday 23rd April 2023

St George

2nd Sunday after Easter

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

I remember a French song we still use to sing to pay homage to the patron saint of the catholic boy-scouts, who is the patron saint and protector of our country we are celebrating today:

Fier chevalier, l'éclat de ton armure
Comme un soleil attire tous les yeux ;
Ta loyauté, ton âme toute pure
Nous ont conquis, et nous voici joyeux.

Fierce knight, the sparkle of thy armour
Like a sun, it attracts all eyes to thee;
Thy loyalty, thy soul, all pure,
Have conquered us, and here we are, joyful.

Such words, and the melody used to sing it, sounded quite military, and calling for unexpected, extraordinary things: there were putting in words and chant an ideal, an ideal of great things, I would even say an ideal of holiness.

St George is a martyr of the 4th century, from the area of Cappadocia (now Turkey). Son of a noble and talented soldier of the Roman army, he also enrolled himself to serve the Empire, and due to his talents, and the good fame of his father, he soon became part of the Pretorian guard of the emperor Diocletian.

Baptised at birth by his father, who feared he might die as he was quite weak and frail, he never missed an opportunity to witness his Faith, even at these times, which, as we know, were not truly favourable for the young Church. It is said he even converted to Faith the wife of the emperor.

But the emperor chose, as his predecessor before him to persecute Christians, and initiated one of the longest and most terrible persecution for them. Being in such position, and quite close to the emperor, St George, like St Philomena at the same period of time, was ask to "swerve from his allegiance to the King of Heaven"¹. He answered by handing his sword back to the emperor, preferring a life without honours, but still in accordance with the will of God.

He went back to his native country, and there, helped people of an area who were submitted to gangsters, who were led by a man, whose name is known as meaning snake, or dragon. As a reward for this action, he only asks for his payment that the whole area came to the Faith.

¹ Novena prayer to St Philomena

Later, when he was caught and dragged in front of the emperor again, the legend of St George reported us the following dialogue:

“Young man,” replied Diocletian, “think of your future!”

“I am a Christian,” said George, “I have no ambition or regret in this world; nothing can shake my faith.” He was then beaten with rods, then underwent the awful torture of the wheel, after which an angel descended from Heaven to heal his wounds.

A few days later, the martyr reappeared full of life in the presence of the emperor, who thought him dead; he again reproached him for his cruelty and urged him to acknowledge the true God. For three days he was left on a bed of quicklime; then iron shoes were put on him, reddened with fire, and he was made to swallow a very violent poison.

George, by the grace of God, underwent all these trials without suffering any harm; several pagans were even converted at the sight of so many wonders. The invincible athlete of faith was taken back to his prison and in a dream, he saw Jesus Christ coming down to him:

“George,” He said to him, presenting him with a crown of precious stones, “this is the reward I have in store for you in Heaven; do not fear, I will fight with you tomorrow, and you will win a definitive victory over the devil.”

The next day Diocletian tried to shake the martyr by flattery: “Take me before your gods,” said George. They led him there, believing that he would finally sacrifice. When he reached the statue of Apollo, he made the sign of the Cross and said, “Do you want me to make sacrifices to you as to God?” The voice of the devil replied, “I am not God; there is no God but the One you preach.” And at the same time the statue felt to dust. The people fled in horror, and the defeated emperor, humiliated and furious, had the martyr beheaded.²

Because of his total dedication to Christ, and his history as a soldier, St George, alongside other soldiers, became one of the patron saint and example of chivalry, and Christian conduct in battles. Although we’re no longer really fighting with weapons like he did, his example must be still living and present to us in modern time. We are in need of that type of figure, leading us to heaven, victorious against the devil.

The common representation of St George is a knight, on horseback, piercing with his spur the head of a dragon, who tries to attack him. The comparison is easy to understand, since we are constantly battling against the devil, who always sends trap and toils against us.

Let’s use the shield of prayer and humility, stained with a red cross, to protect us. Let’s use the spur of fire of our actions, moved with charity, to pierce the head of the antique enemy. St George, by his example, courage and virtue, will definitely leads us to eternity, to Heaven, no matter what could happen to us, but our faith being preserved.

² <https://viechretienne.catholique.org/saints/1066-saint-georges>
www.DeepL.com/Translator

Saint George, guide us
Along the clear and beautiful road
Saint George, guide us
Make us firm and ready for anything!

Happy feast England!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.