

## Thursday of the 1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent

### Homily of Bishop John Barres

#### St. Agnes Cathedral

December 2, 2021

On December 8, 2020, we celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Pope Blessed Pius IXth proclaiming on December 8, 1870 that St. Joseph is the Universal Patron of the Catholic Church.

To mark the occasion, Pope Francis proclaimed a Year of St. Joseph that would last from December 8<sup>th</sup> 2020 to December 8<sup>th</sup> 2021. He also issued a beautiful Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* which I cannot recommend too highly.

We have six days left to celebrate the Year of St. Joseph. We are also celebrating simultaneously a Year of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Founder of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits.

In celebrating today both the Year of St. Joseph and the Year of St. Ignatius of Loyola, I would present to you St. Nicolas Owen. St. Nicolas live from 1562 to 1606.

He was a Jesuit Brother, a Catholic Martyr, and a master Carpenter who built the house of his life, the house of his courageous Catholic witness and the house of his heroic holiness on the Rock of Jesus Christ and the Church.

St. Nicolas was canonized as one of the forty martyrs of England and Wales by Pope St. Paul VI in October 1970.<sup>1</sup>

As a carpenter, St. Nicolas was a son of St. Joseph. He used his carpentry skills in a unique and creative way in a time of Church persecution in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. He built hiding places for priests in English houses and mansions.

These hiding places were the work of a master craftsman who grounded his creative carpentry in an Ignatian spirit of prayer, dedication and courage in spreading the Kingdom of God and praying for the salvation of souls.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. I have drawn on some of the material provided by Fr. Raymond J. De Souza in his article, "St. Nicolas Owen, a Carpenter Saint For the Year of St. Joseph," in the April 11-24, 2021 *National Catholic Register*, 7.

Priests' lives were constantly in danger and when caught they were tortured and executed. Holy priests like St. Henry Garnet, SJ and Fr. John Gerard, SJ courageously and clandestinely moved through England celebrating Mass, hearing confessions, preaching and catechizing.

St. Nicolas Owen's ingeniously designed "priest holes" and hiding places enabled these courageous priests to escape their persecutors and continue their priestly ministry.

St. Nicolas helped keep the light and power of the Eucharist and the Catholic Mass radiating throughout England during this time of brutal persecution.

In 1594, St. Nicolas Owen was imprisoned in the Tower of London and then released. He then designed and assisted in the escape of Fr. Gerard from the Tower of London.

Eventually, St. Nicolas was hunted down, tortured and martyred. His steadfastness in suffering with Christ was part of his training as a lay brother Jesuit, a son of St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Ignatius' spiritual exercises and a son of St. Joseph the Worker and Carpenter.

Happy Year of St. Joseph and Happy Year of St. Ignatius of Loyola to all!

Our Lady, Queen of Martyrs, pray for us!

St. Joseph the Worker and Carpenter, pray for us!

St. Ignatius of Loyola, pray for us!

St. Francis Xavier, pray for us!

St. Nicolas Owen, son of St. Joseph and son of St. Ignatius, pray for us!