

Novena To the Welsh Martyrs
for the Parish of Wrexham Maelor



St Anne, Wrexham

and

Our Lady and The Welsh Martyrs, Overton

Day 1 - Conviction - Our first thought about martyrs is normally that these are people who have died for their faith. Men and women with great conviction of belief in the Faith. We in the Western world can easily forget that Martyrs are not a thing from the days of the Roman Empire. Martyrs exist today. Our Christian brothers and sisters are put to death for their belief in Jesus today. A new martyr may even be made as you read this. A sobering thought. Today we pray for those who still suffer martyrdom and persecution throughout the world.

Spend some time as we begin this Novena to the Martyrs reflecting on what your faith means to you. Perhaps spend some time in prayer asking Jesus to reveal Himself to you and bless you with the grace of greater faith and love for Him.

Day 2 - Witness – The word ‘martyr’ is Greek not for those who suffer, but for those who are *Witnesses*. We call them martyrs not because they died for their faith, but because their faith was made clear, and as a result they were killed for it. The martyrs were not desperate to die, but rather recognised that they were being forced into a life that was not a full commitment to Jesus, and their hearts were so committed to Him that they would rather die than live out a false life. Even if we do not suffer true martyrdom, each of us will likely face moments where we have the choice to make individual martyrdoms: social, familial, or personal situations where we have to choose between living out Christianity honestly and openly, or taking a more acceptable pathway.

Today let us pray for forgiveness for all the times we hid our faith when we could have lived as witnesses instead. Let us pray for the courage to be more open and honest about our beliefs going forward.

Day 3 - Death - The ancient monks used to greet each other ‘Memento Mori’ – remember your death. This served as a reminder to each of them that the day of our death is unescapable. We cannot avoid it; we can only prepare for it. We should always live with our death in mind, never taking our days for granted. Each day will no doubt present us with opportunities for ‘little deaths’ where we have to put our selfishness aside. Whether we let ourselves get angry over a slight, whether what we say is true or gossip, whether it is kind and should be left unsaid. Whether we should do the task we promised we would, or let it slide by as we take our ease.

Let us pray for the grace to accept these small martyrdoms as a part of our growth in holiness.

Day 4 - Life in the Modern World - St Irenaeus said that “the glory of God is Man fully alive,” and the Church has always understood being fully alive to be healthy balance of our spiritual and natural selves: our faith and our personality, if you will. We need to find the place where our faith and interests can intersect and live there joyfully. Why? I cannot express enough in this short space just how much civilisation has benefitted from Christians living their lives and faiths truly. The Modern world is on a cultural crash course downwards, and it desperately needs Christians living their faith with a radical audacity. I do not mean an arrogant forcing of our beliefs on others, but I certainly mean a respectful boldness to not have our beliefs suppressed. We must brazenly live out our faith with *joy*. Living Martyrdom as witnesses means showing our faith bravely, but that does not mean living solemnly.

Spend some time today in prayer asking Jesus to fill you with the Joy of the Holy Spirit and reveal which of our interests we can use to greater glorify Him.

Day 5 - Vocation - We often think of the word vocation as something that is only to do with the priesthood. In fact, these days it has almost become something of a dirty word, however, we are all called to serve. Everyone has a vocation. Firstly, we are all called to a relationship with God, but then we have our personal vocation or mission – “a definite service” as St John Henry Newman put it – and lastly we have our life’s vocation, the means by which we achieve the life and work God has planned for us: priesthood, religious life, marriage etc. None are easy. In fact, all walks of life are as difficult as they are wonderful, just as all vocations are necessary to the Church. The Church is not a Cruise ship where a small few serve the majority. The Church is a battleship where we are all pressed into the Lord’s service. Every member of the Church has a duty – and indeed is called by God – to be a part of Its work in some way. The Martyrs remind us that no Christian is free from putting their hand to the plough. God does not call us to lives of pain and hurt, but to the life that allows us to become truly ourselves.

Our vocation in this life ends only at our death. Spend some time in prayer today asking Jesus to reveal how you are being called into His work at this time.

Day 6 - Community - Saints call to saints, disciples to disciples. Christians who live their faith truthfully will draw other such people to themselves. The martyrs would have been drawn together by their holiness even if they were not drawn together by their circumstance. From this we can learn that there is strength in numbers. A coal left by itself will smoulder, but slowly go out. Coals kept together burn hot. So too with Christians: the more apart we set ourselves, the less our hearts truly burn

within us. Community is also a part of our mission, or rather, our sense of mission flows out of our sense of community. Communities alive with a love for Jesus seek to bring others into that. The evils of this world will be overcome by community because that is where we find people to be compassionate towards. The Church is not a private club for the righteous, but a base camp for those looking to ascend to God and be transformed together.

Today let us pray for the transformation of our communities. The community we live, the community of people we have chosen to be a part of our lives. Most particularly the transformation of the community we worship in. May Jesus stir up the Holy Spirit in our parish for our own good, and the good of those who live around us.

Day 7 - Renewal – The Church Father Tertullian taught that “the blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the Church.” Witness of true faith produces growth and renewal in the Church. We follow from example, so who are we following and who are we setting an example for? Indeed, who is following us? Because disciples make disciples; that should be our goal. These may seem insignificant matters. In recent decades, people have often left it to the Church to set the example, assuming that if we simply bring our children along the faith will be absorbed. Recent scandals have shown that perhaps the example set is not always one worth imitating. Rather, children learn from imitating their parents and family members. We cannot risk simply leaving it to chance that the next generation will pick up the faith by placement. We must set the standard. We must set the example in our homes, families, and communities.

Today let us pray for the courage, patience, and desire to set an example of our faith for those around us to learn from.

Day 8 - Endurance – The Martyrs should also encourage us to have endurance. The sufferings of their deaths teach us that with a true love for Jesus, all things can be endured. It is easy to mistake God for a genie, here to solve our problems. Thus, when difficulty strikes and He doesn't magic it away, we lose faith, and often turn against Him. God is not here to take away our struggles. He is here to walk through them with us, to grant us the grace to endure and face them together. As St Paul says, we must work to run the race, and run to win. Life will always difficult in some way. There will always be struggle in some way. The Martyrs endured, and so can we. The Church faces a bleak future at the moment. It would be easy to abandon ship. Sometimes other, more popular Churches seem more fun. However, if a Church is struggling, is that not the time that Church needs to be filled with people who love Jesus? To be filled with people who are willing to stick around and push through to the other side?

Let us pray for God's grace to continue when we face struggles. To endure whatever difficulty faces us – personally or a s a parish – by relying on Him and His strength, not just our own.

Day 9 - Future - We can perhaps all understand the longing to do something meaningful with our lives. The Martyrs teach us that we can spend our whole lives living for just one significant moment, the fruit of which will not be seen in our own lifetimes. Whilst their deaths surely gave strength and courage to the Catholics around them at the time, are we not praying to them now? Are we not trying to learn from their example now, some four hundred years later? How is that for a legacy? Jesus so frequently reminds us that our faith should yield fruit, and that was to teach us that the effects are never going to be instant. They come later, after time. Jesus is calling us to live out our faith in way that –

like a fruit tree – yields goodness for the generations following us. Our faith is planting in a garden, of which we may not see the fruit in this life. The Welsh Martyrs should remind us that the work we are trying to do in the Church now is to build a Church that supports and inspires generations of our descendants. That future starts now. John Paul 2 told us, “Do not be afraid to be the saints of the Third Millennium.” Now is the time we must begin to live our faith, and become the holy men and woman that future generations look to.

Let us pray today that God helps guide us towards what the Church must be. That He fills us with the gifts of faith, hope, and love so that we may become the saints of the Third Millenium, regardless or our doubts or fears. We pray also for the future Church, that we may be shown how to build it with God today.

NOVENA PRAYER:

Almighty God, in the memory of St Richard Gwyn and all Your beloved Welsh Martyrs, we humbly ask You to look with favour on our Parish. We ask that you fill us with the same Spirit of faith, hope, and love that You gave them.

We pray for the regeneration of our Parish, and our diocese, that we might all be set aflame by the Holy Spirit with a love for Your Son, Jesus Christ, and a desire to serve Him by living out our faith in the world. Grant us a love for Your Sacraments, and the gift of hearing Your voice in our lives, that we can pursue that unique service we can each offer You.

We pray that You call more holy men and women to the priesthood, and the religious life, and that our fellow Christians are graced with the courage to answer Your call to serve You in this special way. We pray for our parish priest, that he may be kept strong in his faith and hope, and have his heart opened to Your plans for this parish. We pray also that You give strength and wisdom to our Bishop, that he may lead us according to Your will.

This life is strange and full of trials, but we know that You are the one constant that outlasts all things. We pray, that in communion with You, we can build up a strong, faithful, and vibrant parish that will live out the hope of the Welsh Martyrs by building the Kingdom of heaven here in Wales.

Oh Holy Welsh Martyrs, pray for us as we strive to continue your mission for a holy Wales, remembering us in our struggles, and asking God to aid us. We ask all of this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and one true goal.

PRAYER TO THE WELSH MARTYRS:

Almighty God, who in our country raised up martyrs from every walk of life to vindicate the authority of Your Church in teaching and worship, grant their intercession, we pray, that all our people may be gathered once again to celebrate the same sacraments under the one Shepherd, Jesus Christ Your Son. Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, One God, for ever and ever. Amen