

# Campion Day Mass

Deputy Headmaster Moystn, distinguished guests, members of the Board of Governors, dear faculty members and friends of Stonyhurst College, and, most of all, dear students:

## **Introduction**

It is an honor for me to be with you today in this magnificent Church of St Peter, here at Stonyhurst College, to celebrate the Holy Mass with and for all of you on Campion Day.

I bring with me the greetings of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, of which I am the Archbishop – the oldest archdiocese in the United States of America. Just last month, we celebrated the 225th anniversary of its establishment. While 225 years is not old by European standards, it is old by American standards.

Indeed, the first Archbishop of Baltimore, and the first Catholic Bishop in the United States, John Carroll, was, as you know, an alumnus of St Omer's, the lineal antecedent of this venerable school, as was his cousin, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the only Catholic signer of the American Declaration of Independence.

Just last year, through the kindness of the leaders of the Christian Heritage Centre at Stonyhurst College, I had the honor of receiving, in the chapel of my residence in Baltimore, the crucifix which belonged to Saint Thomas More, and also a relic of Saint Edmund Campion, a piece of the clothing he wore when he travelled through England in disguise, under the assumed name of "Mr. Edmunds", as he risked his life – and ultimately lost his life – in order to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice and preach the Gospel of Salvation to the faithful in England.

## **It is of God; it Cannot be Withstood**

So on this Campion Day, let us think for a moment about the life of St. Edmund Campion, a man who was, with no exaggeration, one of the greatest heroes in the history of the Church. In the broadest terms, Edmund Campion was a young man of truly exceptional talent and intelligence. His acumen for English composition was such that, had he pursued a career in literature, we would today likely mention his

name in the same breath as Shakespeare and Wordsworth. While he was still in his early 20s, he had already attracted the attention and admiration of no less a personage than Queen Elizabeth I. At the time of his Baccalaureate, he took the Oath of Supremacy, and at the age of 24, he was even ordained a Deacon in the Anglican Church. His future in England, and in the Church of England, was limitless and assured.

Yet almost immediately he “took a remorse of conscience and detestation of mind” because he knew in his heart where the truth really lay. Within the space of a decade, the grace of God brought Edmund Campion from England, to Ireland, to Douai, and finally to Rome. It was settled. Campion would be a Catholic. He would be a Jesuit. He would be a priest. As he wrote, in another context, years later: “The expense is reckoned, the enterprise is begun; it is of God; it cannot be withstood. So the Faith was planted: So it must be restored.”

Or, as Msgr. Ronald Knox wrote of him, “That mathematical clearness of mind would not be content to make a sacrifice without going the whole way; he had turned his back upon fame and popularity, and he must join the novitiate which would cut him adrift most effectively from the very memory of such things. He joined the Society for what is, I suppose, the best reason for joining the Society; he read the Exercises, and they said to him, ‘This means you.’”

As a Jesuit priest in England, Campion was one of the most hunted men in the country. Having travelled around the country in disguise, he was arrested, put through a show trial, and was convicted of treason in November of 1581. With consummate self-possession, he answered the verdict with the words: “In condemning us, you condemn all your own ancestors, all our ancient bishops and kings, all that was once the glory of England — the island of saints, and the most devoted child of the See of Peter.”

On the first of December of that year, he was hanged, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn. As the executioner dismembered his body, a drop of his blood splashed onto a young bystander, Henry Walpole. So great was the effect of that martyrdom, and of God’s grace, in the soul of Henry Walpole, that thereafter he too became a Catholic, a priest, a martyr, and a Saint. As Tertullian said in the first Christian

centuries, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

### **The Relics at Stonyhurst**

This school is so privileged to have such a close link with such heroes of the Faith. Indeed, it is a beautiful tradition which you saw today, that, at the beginning of Mass, the head boy and the head girl carried to the altar two precious relics: one was the very rope which tied St. Edmund Campion to the cart on which he was dragged through the streets of London to his execution, and the other was a corporal, which is a square piece of white cloth which is placed under the Chalice on the altar. The corporal brought in procession today was the very one which was used by imprisoned priests to secretly say Mass in the Tower of London, as they awaited their martyrdom.

### **The Grace of Conversion**

All of you no doubt have heard of another of the most distinguished sons of Catholic England, Blessed John Henry Newman. On this Campion Day, we might wonder this: just as there would be no Saint Paul had it not been for the martyrdom of St. Stephen, so too it is the blood of Saint Edmund Campion and of all the English martyrs, is what obtained the grace of conversion for John Henry Newman. Today those same graces are being poured out—in ways known only to God— on the heirs of the Catholic Church in this land today, among which you are certainly numbered.

So on this great feast day, may these heroes of the Faith intercede for all of us. And in the words of Msgr. Ronald Knox, speaking of Saint Edmund Campion: “So he came to us, in the disguise of a servant; the same disguise his Master had worn, all those years ago. And, at the beginning of Advent, they murdered him, as such Governments will. In these dark times, may his blood avail us.”

May God bless us, and keep us in His love!