

ST OLIVER PLUNKETT NOVENA 2020

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The Novena to St. Oliver is promoted by the Parish of St. Peter, Drogheda. The resource includes a theme for each day along with a prayer and a short commentary based on each theme. It is suggested that it could be used this year from 23rd June leading up to the Feast on 1st July. Alternatively, a Triduum could be held from Monday 29th up to the Feast on Wednesday 1st. Such a Triduum would coincide with the reopening of some of our churches for public Mass. The commentary (first paragraph of each daily theme) is optional and may be used as an added resource for each day or as a basis for a homily. The St. Oliver Festival Mass will be celebrated by Bishop Michael Router at the National Shrine of St. Oliver in Drogheda on Sunday 5th July at 4.00pm and will be accessible by St. Peter's Parish website, www.saintpetersdrogheda.ie (St. Peter's Church webcam).

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Day 1 - Tuesday 23rd June : Theme - Man of Faith

St Oliver was born in Loughcrew, Co. Meath on the Feast of All Saints, 1625. As a young man of faith he wished to become a priest and he studied for the priesthood in the Irish College in Rome. After his ordination he was unable to return to Ireland as a result of the Cromwellian Conquest, so he undertook further studies, becoming a teaching professor in Propaganda Fide College in the Eternal City. On his appointment as Archbishop of Armagh by Pope Clement IX in 1669 he willingly returned to Ireland, even though he knew a life of hardship with many trials and difficulties awaited him. The Lord rewarded his deep faith and in less than ten years St Oliver accomplished much as the Archbishop of Armagh.

Glorious Martyr, Saint Oliver, who willingly gave your life for your faith, help us also to be strong in faith. May we be loyal like you to the See of Peter. By your intercession and example may all hatred and bitterness be banished from the hearts of Irish men and women. May the peace of Christ reign in our hearts, as it did in your heart, even at the moment of your death. Pray for us and for Ireland. Amen.

O Holy Saint Oliver, Bishop and Martyr, defender of the Faith and glory of our country, full of confidence we beg you to obtain our petitions, and pray for us to the God you loved and served heroically unto death. Amen.

Our Father Hail Mary Glory be

Day 2 – Wednesday 24th June : Theme - Man of Courage

There are many instances where St Oliver courageously defended the victims of injustice. He often travelled in disguise, dressed as a soldier, Captain William Browne, “with my sword, wig and pair of pistols.” When a bounty was offered for his capture, he refused the easy option of exile but went on the run, writing: “We shall not abandon our flocks unless compelled to do so, we shall first try out the prisons and other torments, already we have suffered so much on the mountains, in huts and caves, and have acquired the habit of suffering to the extent that it will be less inconvenient and difficult in the future... We shall flee to the mountains and caves in which these past fifteen months we have put in a very strict novitiate.” St Oliver was never afraid to take the action required, irrespective of the consequences for himself, writing: “Let the world perish, but let justice be done”. One of his regular quotes was: “If the whole world should come crashing down, the ruins will not strike an undaunted man.”

God our Father, you raised up St Oliver to be a shepherd of your people in troubled times. We thank you for his example of love, faithful even unto death. May the memory of his life and sufferings confirm our faith, deepen our hope and inflame our own poor love for you. Amen.

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Our Father Hail Mary Glory be

Day 3 – Thursday 25th June : Theme - Founder of Schools

St Oliver believed that education of the young should be a priority in his apostolate as Archbishop of Armagh. Within three months of his arrival back in Ireland, and despite huge opposition, he founded a school in Drogheda, built at his own expense. He also retrained priests in this college at Drogheda, as for many decades priests in Ireland had not had an opportunity of a proper priestly formation. Within three and a half years, the school was knocked to the ground by the secular authorities. Despite the schools short existence it achieved much, and left an enduring legacy among the youth. The college for priests also played a crucial and lasting role in educating and reforming the clergy of the time.

We thank you and we bless you, Lord our God. In times past you taught us in many and varied ways through the prophets, but in this, the final age, you have taught us through your Son. After his great example St Oliver founded schools for the education of the young. May they be filled with knowledge of your will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, and bear fruit in every good work. Amen.

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Our Father Hail Mary Glory be

Day 4 – Friday 26th June : Theme - Promoter of Peace and Reconciliation

St Oliver brought peace and order to each diocese that he visited by settling countless disputes, writing: “I found serious divisions in them...But by the grace of God, all is now quiet in the dioceses which I have visited.” He also went in person to the hideout of the Tories or Raparees who were carrying on a war of attrition and successfully negotiated ‘as Gaeilge’ a peace agreement between them and the Government, writing: ‘The [Metropolitan] Province [of Armagh] has not had greater peace in thirty years.’ St Oliver is recognised as Patron for Peace and Reconciliation in Ireland and we give thanks to God that in the early decades of the twenty-first century, we can now repeat those same words of St Oliver. We pray through his intercession that this may continue into the future as we crave for lasting peace and reconciliation in our country and in our local communities, despite the new challenges of our time.

God our Father, you instruct us through the Scriptures that we have been wonderfully made. We know that you have created us in love and to be loved; but we more often see that the life you regard as sacred is taken for granted, used and discarded, and treated as having no value. Through the intercession of St Oliver we ask you to banish violence and intimidation, to promote peace and stability, to defend the vulnerable, and protect our homes, our streets, our parishes and archdiocese. Amen.

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Our Father Hail Mary Glory be

Day 5 – Saturday 27th June : Theme - Man of Forgiveness and Mercy

Having already distinguished himself in the Santo Spirito Hospital in Rome for his works of charity, Archbishop Oliver pawned his valuables at a time of famine in Ireland so as to be able to provide bread for the poor. He wrote that he never censured any priest unless after four or five warnings and he succeeded in bringing back Friar Harold “without any fuss and with gentle treatment.” In his last speech delivered from the gallows at Tyburn he forgave the judges and those who had given false evidence against him at the trial: “I beg of my Saviour to grant them true repentance, I do forgive them with all my heart... I do heartily forgive them, and also the judges...I do also forgive those who had a hand in bringing me from Ireland to be tried here, where it was morally impossible for me to obtain a fair trial...I ask forgiveness of all those whom I ever offended by thought word or deed.” He then begged God’s forgiveness for himself praying: “And, I beseech your Divine Majesty, by the merits of Christ, and by the intercession of his Blessed Mother, and all the holy Angels and Saints, to forgive me my sins, and to grant my soul eternal rest.”

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you, through our own fault, in thought, word, and deed, and in what we have left undone. For the sake of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us all our offences. Through the

intercession of St Oliver may we who have experienced your forgiveness and mercy willingly extend it to those who offend us, and grant that we may serve you in newness of life, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

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Our Father Hail Mary Glory be

Day 6 – Sunday 28th June : Theme - Bringer of Hope to his People

Shortly after his return as the Archbishop of Armagh in 1670, St Oliver organised national and diocesan church synods. His plan of action was becoming clearer and over the following three years he enjoyed relative freedom. His strategies brought hope, regularity, normality and peace to the dioceses, eliminating many of the abuses which had crept in. During this time, the wind was at his back, the sails fully unfurled, and the four horses that he owned were saddled and kept well exercised as he criss-crossed the country on his many visitations. He undertook remarkable feats of physical endurance and achieved remarkable successes in his work during those early years. By the time he was put on board a ship as a prisoner almost ten years later, the Church was largely united and had reasserted itself. As a result of his efforts, the Church in Ireland was much reformed from its earlier state and many of its former abuses had been rooted out. Importantly, its lines of communication had been re-established and its diocesan personnel and structures although still under much harassment, were functioning and had become fit for purpose. They later proved themselves capable of withstanding the next wave of persecution which was already coming down the tracks.

Heavenly Father, we come before you today in need of hope. There are times when we feel helpless, weak, and overwhelmed. Our daily routine becomes heavy and cumbersome when accompanied by so much useless worry. St Oliver worked tirelessly against great obstacles and anxiety, and never lost hope. Help us in our perseverance too, that during our greatest trials the hope that was gifted to us by your Son may continue to burn brightly in our hearts. Amen.

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Day 7 – Monday 29th June : Theme - Loyal and Obedient

Archbishop Oliver was renowned for his love and loyalty to the Holy See. He was obedient to any instruction or even suggestion coming to him from Rome and he wrote: “The Holy See is the chief physician, I am the under-physician and to me is entrusted a great number of patients...The will to cure this illness is not enough for us under-physicians; the senior-physician must put his hands on it.” This belief strongly permeated his thinking and he was always happy to seek and to receive advice or instructions from Rome, writing: “Teach what you command, command what you will, I shall carry out your command.”

God our Father you have given us shepherds on earth to guide and care for your people. We pray for Francis our Pope and Eamon our Bishop. We understand that the Evil One refused to serve an Incarnate God, and that his pride is a great temptation in our hearts too. Help us, through the intercession of Archbishop Plunkett to remain faithful to your Word and to what it calls us, and humbly to live it out in our daily lives. Amen.

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Day 8 - Tuesday 30th June : Theme - He lived the Beatitudes

St Oliver lived the beatitudes, a man of high standards who led from the front and brought reform to the Church. Knowing that his time to do good was short, he worked tirelessly and travelled extensively, writing: “I did not give repose to brain, pen or even horses these four years, in a vast province of eleven dioceses.” At another time he wrote: “I labour night and day in the affairs of my calling, and I neither give rest to my brain nor sleep to my eyes, and may it be to the greater glory of God and the service of the Holy See, which is the spreading of the holy faith.” The Mass Rock was in

vogue and St Oliver must have come to know most of the Mass Rocks which were dotted across the Northern Province, writing: "There are bearded men of sixty who have not yet received the Sacrament of Confirmation." When forced into hiding, he caught up with his correspondence and prayed intensely, writing: "I have however two consolations, one is interior, namely that I suffer for a good cause, and this will have its result, so I hope in the Divine Mercy, an eternal reward." A man of moderation and a former owner of a small vineyard in Italy, St Oliver gave up alcohol so as to give good example to the clergy. On the feast of St Peter's Chair in 1674, while on the run in South Armagh during a snowstorm, he was almost suffocated in snowdrifts. He later thanked God for being able to suffer for the Chair of Peter, praying: "I hope I will in the long run break the violence of the tempestuous waves." Later, during the nineteen months that he spent in prison before his martyrdom, and in spite of the meagre food rations and many hardships of a 17th century prison cell, his jailors reported that he fasted three or four days a week.

God our Father, through your Son's preaching you have revealed to us that your ways are different from our ways. What our society considers lowly and contemptible you elevate, and what is exalted here on earth, is not always pleasing to you. May we follow the example of St Oliver, a true man of the Beatitudes, and listen first to the Word of God as our model for right living. Amen.

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Our Father Hail Mary Glory be

Day 9 - Wednesday 1st July : Theme - Martyr and Saint

St Oliver worked tirelessly as Archbishop for ten years, paying the ultimate price of martyrdom in 1681. His crowning glory was the manner of his death, humble, heroic and holy. For some considerable time, he had given his all. Now he was being asked to give his life blood as well, and he was happy to do just that, writing: "If I were a man that had not good principles, I might easily have saved my life; but I had rather die ten thousand deaths, than wrongfully take away one farthing of any man's goods, one day of his liberty, or one minute of his life." Oliver's willing sacrifice both in life and in death was soon handsomely rewarded by God. St Oliver's dying prayers as Archbishop and Primate, his courageous and strong witness, his deep holiness through prayer and fasting which shone ever brighter over two harsh winters while in prison, and his loving and absolute forgiveness of anyone who may have brought about his downfall, all had a profound effect, and the Lord answered his prayer. As a result, St Oliver became the last of the one hundred and five Catholic martyrs of Tyburn who had given their lives over the previous one hundred and fifty years. It must be highly significant that he is also the very last of the Catholic martyrs condemned by the state in these islands. St Oliver was canonised on 12th October 1975. A lesser person might have compromised along the way and lived a longer life, but a lesser person would not have become a canonised saint. Deo Gratias.

God our Father in every age the seeds of the Church are watered by the blood of the martyrs. St Oliver bravely counted his fidelity to you as infinitely more important than his own life and comfort. As persecution against Christian faithful rises across the world, we pray that you will give your grace and strength to all who may be asked to witness for their love for you, even with their very lives. Amen.

O Holy Saint Oliver, Bishop and Martyr, defender of the Faith and glory of our country, full of confidence we beg you to obtain our petitions, and pray for us to the God you loved and served heroically unto death. Amen.

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