



St Marylebone  
Parish Church

## Wednesday Healing Mass 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020

### Readings: Wisdom 4:10-15 John 12:24-26

One day, there won't be different kinds of Christians. One day, we will all be one, as Jesus prayed: 'Father may they be one, as we are one'.

So one of the signs of the Kingdom of God, is when Christians work together for a *greater* good, rather than just the flourishing of their own denomination.

Last Sunday, Pope Francis joined the Archbishop of Canterbury and representatives of the Orthodox, Pentecostal and Methodist churches to celebrate Pentecost, the pouring out of God's Holy Spirit upon the early church. This was the culmination of Thy Kingdom Come: an ecumenical novena of prayer from Ascension to Pentecost. The Pope called upon all Christians to seek a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in order that we might be bearers of Christ's love, light and hope. He urged us to be more deeply united as witnesses of mercy for the human family so severely tested in these days. United to face the pandemic of the virus, but also the pandemics of hunger, war, contempt for life and indifference to others.

And today, both the Catholic and Anglican churches remember an ecumenical group of Christians who were dramatically martyred for being faithful witnesses, united as Pope Francis described in an ecumenism of blood. Today we remember 23 Anglican and 22 Catholic Christian converts aged between 15 and 30 martyred in the Kingdom of Buganda, now Uganda, in the 1880s. It was at a time of great political struggle, as European powers began the Scramble for Africa. And it was also a time of religious struggle in the Bugandan court between Islam, Anglicanism and Catholicism. Many of the Ugandan martyrs served as pages to King Mwanga, who sounds as if he was a thoroughly unpleasant chap.

Not only couldn't he countenance the fact of his pages acknowledging a higher power than his; he also was most put out when they were no longer prepared to be his sexual slaves. Horribly, they were burned alive on Ascension Day.

They walked to their death singing hymns and praying for their enemies. Those who watched were inspired and many were converted. It is said that the Ugandan martyrs

showed that Christianity had become genuinely African and was no longer just a Western religion. These days 84% of Ugandans are affiliated to Christianity. The blood of the martyrs is indeed the seed of the church. As we emerge from this time of pandemic, and our thoughts and concerns are around returning to our church buildings, dealing with the fall out of these past months; we do well to remember the persecuted church and those many modern day martyrs who have held the faith through untold misery and suffering. We remember the 21 Coptic Christians beheaded by Isis in Libya five years ago. Even now there are many Christians who don't possess a bible, who are imprisoned, ridiculed, tortured or forbidden to worship. There are many who have been martyred in our lifetimes, some whose names we will one day know, many others who will remain anonymous.

Of whom the world was not worthy. Christians are persecuted because they are Christians, not because they are Roman Catholic or Anglican or Pentecostal. In the persecutor's eyes we are already one.

May God give all Christians the courage of the Ugandan martyrs to be faithful witnesses to our faith; to refuse to be treated as less than human, to acknowledge a greater power than human authority, and to be people who attract others to the way of Jesus. And, one day, may we all be one.