

3. Bl. John Ogilvie

'In my end is my beginning'; the personal motto of Mary Queen of Scots sums up the Christian attitude to death. On the lips of the martyr it is a triumphant cry of faith.

When the martyr is a Jesuit, we see in his martyrdom the answer to his *Sume et suscipe*. The contemplation for obtaining divine love has been fulfilled. The martyr has proved his love in deed, not in words only. He has shared with Christ all that he has, all that he is.

But we cannot be one with Christ in glory if we refuse to be one with him in suffering. The martyr must have accepted Christ's invitation to share with him the 'third degree of humility'

That is the lesson of the Spiritual Exercises. It is the lesson of Blessed John Ogilvie, as of all the martyrs. He lived and died by the Exercises.

His world was very different from our own, yet he speaks to us across the centuries. He was six or seven years old when Mary Queen of Scots died on the scaffold. He grew up as a child in a Scotland which had rejected her, and with her the old faith of his fathers.

At the age of twelve he crossed to the continent in pursuit of education. It was a time of spiritual crises. It required great spiritual insight to see where truth lay, to sift out genuine renewal from false innovations. Religion was all too often mixed up with politics, ambition and greed. The unity of the Church was in danger.

After an agony of indecision John Ogilvie discovered his true spiritual home within the Catholic Church. He was young, but he had all the generosity and idealism of youth. Having been awakened to the universality of God's love, he determined to answer Christ's call to serve him in spreading his kingdom.

He became a novice in the Province of Austria, which then included Bohemia. His early years as a Jesuit, from 1599 until his ordination in Paris in 1610, are recorded in the history of the Bohemian Province: his influence over the young as the director of a Sodality of Our Lady, his inspiration as a leader in works of charity and penance. But always there is the call of danger, the persistent request to be allowed to work as a priest behind the iron curtain of his native land.

Martyr for the Papacy

After an exile of twenty-two years he returns to Scotland. His apostolate is brief. He is betrayed and imprisoned. He tastes the bitterness of Christ's passion in an enforced 'vigil' of eight days and nine nights. He is fastened to heavy iron 'stocks', so that he cannot stand up or lie down. His thoughts are for others: his greatest fear is of betraying his friends, even unconsciously. He writes letters of recommendation for his fellow-prisoners for the faith.

We have his own record of his imprisonment, smuggled out of prison. This is not a spiritual diary, but a factual, vivid account of his capture and the debates he was forced to take part in, always with great skill and energy. His characteristically Scottish sense of humour never left him.

Times change, but principles do not. In John Ogilvie's day the spirit of the age left the Church with no other option than to defend the faith by way of controversy, and most effectively of all by martyrdom. Now at last there is the opportunity of constructive dialogue with other Christians and with other faiths. There is too the importance of meeting the challenge of those who have no faith at all. The greatest danger to the Church comes today from the erosion of faith itself. It is religion itself, not only the Catholic faith, that is at risk.

The Church is once again in the throes of change, in the midst of a changing world. She has to renew the vision of her vocation in the world of today. There is an urgent need to

discern the movement of the Holy Spirit among the changes of the world around us. In this process of discernment the Society of Jesus has a providential part to play. It is called on to be an instrument of renewal and of unity at the service of the Papacy. This was the mind of St. Ignatius at the time of its formation: it should be also the mind of his followers today.

We can see John Ogilvie as a patron of Christian unity: he had a passionate love for his country, and died to bring it into full communion with the Catholic Church. He recognised the visible centre of that communion in the Papacy, and died, in the words of Pope Pius XI, as 'our martyr'.

We can see him also as a patron of the Europe of his long years of exile, a Europe so vastly different from the Europe that he knew. His own country no longer knows persecution: his story directs our thoughts to the Church of Silence today. He points out to us the enduring Jesuit vocation: to live in Christ's world, responsive to its changing needs, but always walking with Christ as our companion along the way of the cross, which leads also to the glory of the resurrection.

We can then see John Ogilvie as a patron of the strange new world that is being born in our midst, and of the new dialogues that are needed to meet its challenges, and especially the great dialogue between faith and unbelief.

We are reminded that the Society is always being called to discern the spirits of the age, and challenged to a new beginning. The choice of that beginning, as in the case of John Ogilvie, will influence the end to which it leads. In that sense we can also say that 'in my beginning is my end'.

J. Quinn, S.J.