

## Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021

### Monday week 4 in Ordinary Time; optional Memorial of St. Brigid of Ireland or St. Henry Morse

Today we celebrate two saints who lived in very different times, but have one thing in common; they were both converts to the faith.



**St. Brigid of Ireland:** As with many of the early Irish saints, not a lot of detail is known about her, the foremost woman saint of Ireland. Born a pagan, near Dundalk in about 451, she converted to Christianity after hearing St. Patrick preach. She founded a monastery at Kildare for both men and women (Ireland's first women's monastic community) where she died in 525. The origin of "St. Brigid's cross" (traditionally made on this day), is also shrouded in mystery. Tradition says that she used it to explain the meaning of Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection and Ascension to a seriously ill chieftain. He was so impressed that he was baptised, and died holding the cross to his breast.

**St. Henry Morse:** Born in 1595 into a Protestant family, he was converted to Catholicism as a young adult and left to study for the priesthood in Douai and then in Rome. Returning to England in 1624, he was captured almost immediately and spent three years in prison in York where he became a Jesuit under the tutelage of a fellow Jesuit prisoner. His story is one of repeated capture, reprieve, being sent back to Europe and returning to England under aliases.

As "Cuthbert Claxon" he ministered to both Catholics and Protestants in London during the plague of 1636-7, and even fell ill himself but he would not give up. Eventually he was arrested and charged with "perverting 560 of his majesty's subjects" but was released on a bail paid by Queen Henrietta Maria. In 1641 he left England on orders of the King, only to return in 1643, to minister in the Durham area, where he was eventually captured, taken to London and tried at the Old Bailey where he was sentenced to be hanged, drawn, and quartered at Tyburn, on 1 February 1645.

How can the lives of these two saints from very different eras be an inspiration to us? In the first reading the author of the letter to the Hebrews lists many Old Testament saints whose faith kept them strong in the face of challenges and persecution. The Gospel tells us about how Jesus is stronger than 6,000 men (the number of soldiers in a legion) and that nothing is too big a problem for Him. Both St. Brigid and St. Henry Morse faced challenges from societies that did not understand them but they both showed that faith in Christ is stronger than any opposition. Both made a deep impression on those they met and ministered to, regardless of their backgrounds. Let us ask the Holy Spirit for the grace that we too can trust in the power of Jesus to support us in whatever trial we face. Only He can lead us to His Father, who is our heavenly Father.

Sts. Brigid and Henry Morse, pray for us.