

Shannon Garrity

### **Oliver Plunkett**

During a time of darkness and despair, Pope Benedict XV provided the people of Ireland with a glimmer of hope. Forced to fight a war against their own countrymen, tensions ran high throughout the country. However, Oliver Plunkett's beatification in 1920 reignited a sense of determination throughout the country to obtain the political and religious freedom that Ireland had struggled to acquire for centuries. Oliver Plunkett's life symbolizes what it means to have the courage to stand up for what you truly believe in.

Born November 1, 1625 in Co. Meath, Oliver Plunkett felt a calling to enter priesthood at a young age. Luckily, Plunkett was selected along with four other young men to study at the Irish College in Rome. Setting out for Rome in 1647, Plunkett vowed to return to his homeland no matter how bad the political and religious climate was. Not only did Plunkett excel in his studies at Rome, but he also demonstrated the art of helping and giving back to the less fortunate. Plunkett was known for visiting the Santo Spirito hospital in Rome and fed, cleansed, and ministered services to the ill. Naturally, Plunkett was beloved by his community.

Due to the Cromwellian Conquests, Plunkett and his fellow Irish clergymen could not return to Ireland. Plunkett decided to spend his time teaching theology at Propoganda College in Rome. Following Cromwell's death and the restoration of the British monarchy, the political climate and religious tensions eased in Ireland. In 1669, Pope Clement IX ordained Oliver Plunkett to be the Archbishop of Armagh. Without hesitation, Plunkett recognized his calling to bring peace and faith to his homeland. He left his comfortable, safe life in Rome to honor his calling in life.

When Plunkett arrived in Ireland, he saw a dire need to celebrate the Catholic faith. In Rome, Plunkett had seen a great deal of wealth and experienced what it was like to live in a political climate where the Catholic faith was tolerated. However, wealth and acceptance were both absent in Ireland. Plunkett was moved by the ambience of spirituality and appreciation of Catholicism throughout Ireland. He recognized the dedication the people had to their faith and was compelled to take immediate action to honor them.

There was no punishment daunting enough to stop Plunkett from doing what he felt was truly right. Despite the Council of Ireland declaring in 1670 that all clergymen in Ireland must leave the country, Plunkett refused to do so. Instead, Plunkett remained in Ireland and quickly got to work in order to restore the faith. First, Plunkett recognized the need for a school for young boys planning to enter priesthood. He established a male Jesuit College in Drogheda which served as both a school for the youth and a college for those entering priesthood. Along with this, Plunkett traveled throughout Ireland visiting all eleven diocese under his command, delivered masses, and administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to those who had been denied it their entire lives. Although he was forced to endure hunger, fatigue, and exhaustion, Plunkett would not stop until he felt all Catholics in Ireland had been recognized and honored.

Plunkett's dedication to both his faith and others reveals an unparalleled selflessness and humility. His efforts eased the minds of thousands of Catholics across Ireland. In a time of chaos and violence, these people now had a newly restored dedication to their faith to help them get through the difficulties. Due to the lack of churches in Ireland, Plunkett was forced to make the best out of what he had access to. He administered the Sacrament of Confirmation to over 50,000 people in Ireland while also delivering masses in the fields. Along with preaching the faith, Plunkett exuded an aura of tranquility. By refusing to resort to violence and preach against those

who were not Catholics in Ireland, Plunkett helped spread peace throughout the country. His actions helped unite people rather than turn them against each other. His life exemplifies what it means to lead a life dedicated to faith.

Despite Plunkett's peaceful ways and pure intentions, authorities arrested Plunkett in 1679. Plunkett was jailed in Dublin castle for six weeks. Although originally jailed for his priesthood and embracement of Catholicism, a conspiracy had been made against him. It was conspired that Plunkett was planning on bringing French soldiers into Ireland and was going to lead the French and Irish Catholics in an uprising against British rule. Because Plunkett was respected by both Catholics and Protestants in Ireland who would not find him guilty, he was sent to London to face trial. Plunkett was put in solitary confinement for six months while awaiting his trial. During his trial, Plunkett was not allowed to bring witnesses over from Ireland and he was denied access to a defense council. Thus, Plunkett was found guilty of high treason and was sentenced to be hung, disemboweled, quartered, and beheaded. He was given the harshest, most inhumane punishment there was. Despite this, Plunkett carried no malice in his heart. On the day of his execution, Plunkett forgave those who conspired against him and the judge who had ordered this gruesome death. He spent his last moments on earth thanking God for his life and praying the Act of Contrition. He died on July 1, 1681.

Not only did Oliver Plunkett exemplify an extreme dedication to his faith, but he also demonstrated what it means to have the courage to stand behind a cause that is near and dear to your heart. In 1920, when turmoil was running high throughout Ireland and families were being torn apart, there is no doubt that Plunkett's beatification brought both peace of mind to the Irish people and served as a reminder of hope. The British government most likely resented his beatification because it brought up a major miscarriage of justice carried out by their own

government centuries prior. Not only this, but his beatification would only inspire people in Ireland to continue fighting for their cause. And that it most certainly did. The pride and nostalgia generated within the Irish people would have encouraged people to continue fighting for both their Independence and religion. Plunkett's beatification served as a reminder that dedication and faith can generate the strength to conquer any obstacle ahead.