Blessed are the Limerick five

12.

By ROSE RUSHE

Terence Albert O'Brien

THE LIST of Irish 'blesseds' will swell by 17 this year, following a major beatification ceremony in Rome for Irish martyrs. Five of those to be honoured were Limerickmen or had strong Limerick connections.

In September, Pope John Paul II will formally number them among the martyrs of the church.

Hanged from a tree or burned in oil, these men all died for their faith.

"They had the choice to give it up. Instead, they chose to die for it," explains Fr John Leonard, organiser of a pilgrimage to attend the beatification ceremony in Rome.

The essential criterion for martyrdom is the "absolute and unambiguous conclusion" that the person died for the sake of the Catholic faith.

Parish priest of St Paul's and president of Thomond Archeological Society, Fr Leonard, himself from Cloncagh, Ballingarry, is a mine of information on the background to the 16th century martyrs.

(1) Patrick O'Healy, Bishop of Mayo and a Franciscan, and (2) Conn O'Rourke, also a Franciscan, were both martyred in Kilmallock on August 13, 1579.

(3) Maurice MacKenraghty, who was chaplain to the Earl of Desmond, was a native of Kilmallock. He was martyred in Clonmel on April 20, 1525.

(4) Dermot O'Hurley, Archbishop of Cashel, was a native of the parish of Donaghmore, just south of the city. He was killed for the faith in Dublin on June 20, 1584.

And then there was (5) Terence Albert O'Brien, most famous of all, and remembered in the name of the Corporation park in Clare Street. Bishop of Emly, he was hanged in Clare Street. This bishop was killed on October 30, 1651, after the first siege of Limerick.

"Each of these deaths would have cased a sensation at the time, at home and on the continent" outlines Fr Leonard.

"Scholars followed their lives and chronicled their times. Merely to be a Catholic prelate then was against the law. To actively propagate the faith would have been regarded as high treason."

A Catholic priest who counselled resistence in any shape or form could expect no mercy.

As to why the Church took up to 400 years to celebrate its martyrs, he says simply that "it takes a long time to move in matters of beatification.".

The push began early this century, and careful research has sounded out exact detail on the clergymen involved. Beatification is a profound honour, and extensive documentation has to be done, he points out.

A gentle, scholarly man himself, Fr Leonard first fell into the project as curate in Kilmallock for seven years. Being secretary at that stage for the Thomand Archeological Society his inclination towards history, Limerick and religion has him well placed with regard unearthing the forgotten men.

The Desmond and religious wars raged in the background to the deaths of the five mentioned. Lord Drury, appointed by Elizabeth I, was Lord President of Munster at the time of the Kilmallock hangings.

Fr Leonard estimates that up to four hundred Irish people merit the status and reverence of martyrdom for how they lived and died "in less civilised times" as he gently phrases it.

Dermot O'Hurley had his feet placed in metal buckets filled with oil. The oil was then ignited.

Conn O'Rourke, of the ruling house of Breifne, and Patrick O'Healy were hanged in Kilmallock on the very site on which the boy's national school is built. Crochda is the spot, and crochda is the legacy.

They men, who had travelled together on the continent, returned to Askeaton where the Earl of Desmond had his great castle. They were arrested and charged with treason. The grounds were a refusal to take the Oath of Supremacy. Drury condemned them both as: "the Pope's prelates and agents that have been the instruments to seduce ... subjects from their duties and loyalties."

According to Fr Leonard, these were the pre-Cromwellian days when hope was high in the country that Catholicism and the Irish would triumph over the English / Protestant establishment. (The population of Ireland at the time was probably greater than that of England.)

Maurice McKenraghty, whose father was the goldsmith in Kilmallock, forfeited his life to celebrate the Easter sacraments. The mass, ironically, was for his gaoler in Clonmel, who then lost his nerve and betrayed the priest to the authorities.

Fr McKenraghty was hiding safely in the loft of the gaoler's house during the raid by English soldiers, but sacrificed himself when his host was threatened with death unless he revealed McKenraghty's whereabouts.

Bishop Terence Albert O'Brien urged his hearers on the scaffolding to be loyal to their Catholic faith "in all the calamities that had come upon them". His body was then spun from the rope and beaten until it was a bloody pulp. From the day of his death he was venerated as a martyr.

Remarkable times for remarkable men. They clearly had a vision of themselves and their role in salvation which was extraordinary and unyielding.
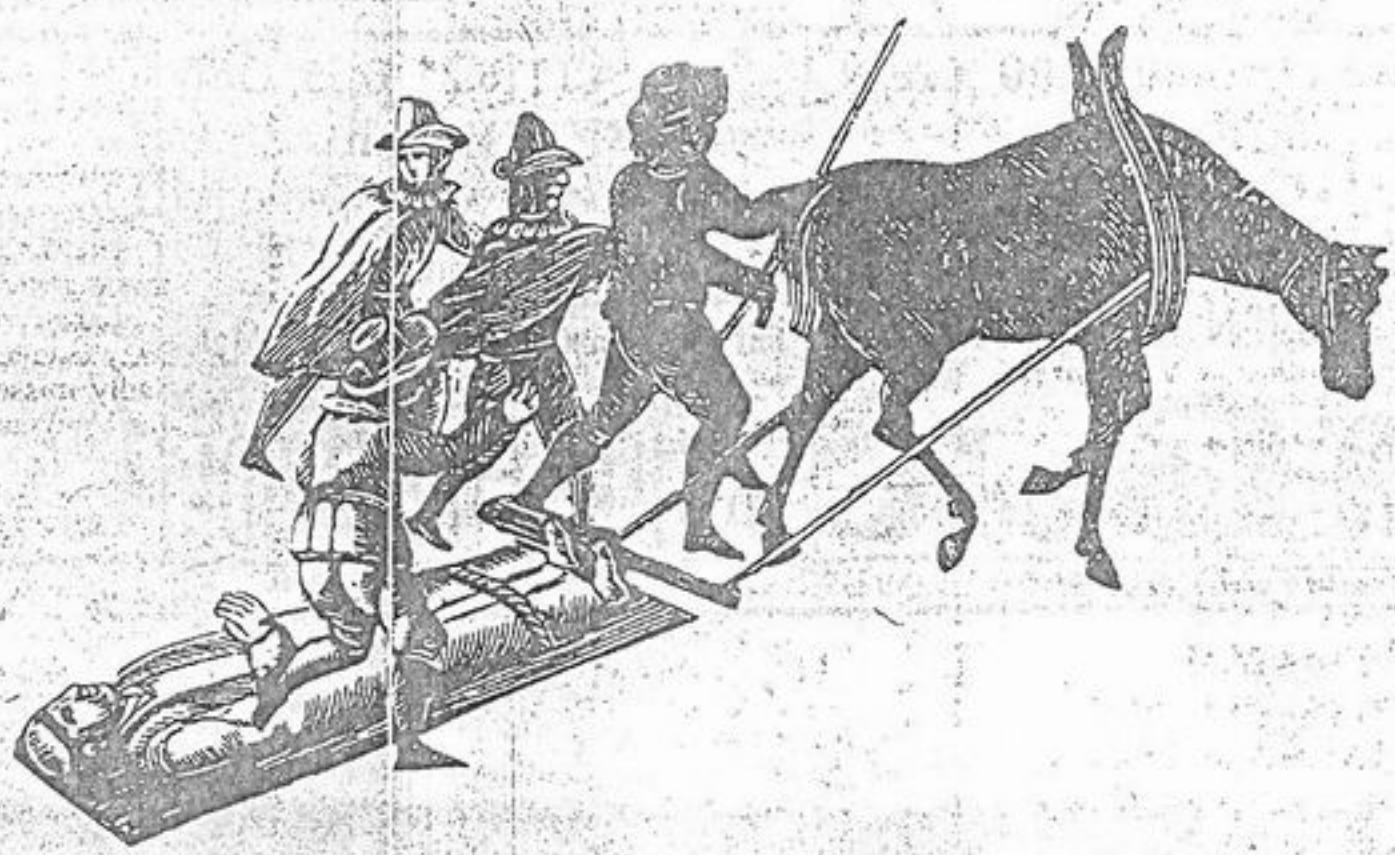
On September 27, the Pope will beatify the Limerick five. The pilgrimage will stay in Rome for that week, booking through Riordan's Travel and Joe Walsh Tours.

Contact Fr Leonard on 29834 for further details on travel and the cermonies in Rome.

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Maurice MacKenraghty

Dermot O'Hurley

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Fish plant improves

PAUL CUSACK has applied to City Hall for planning permission to alter and renovate his existing food processing and associated retail facility at the Dock Road.

The applicant has presented additional information sought by the Corporation.

Retention of restaurant

CARMEL SHERIDAN and Ena Quirke have applied to the Corporation to retain the "Off n' Back" restaurant, at 5 George's Quay.

The application is at present being considered by the planning department.

Laundrette planned

MARIE HARTIGAN c/o Dermot Clancy 31A John Street has applied to the Corporation for planning permission for change of use of a grocery shop to a laundrette at 26 Upper William Street.

The application is a present being considered.