

Saint Edmund Gennings



Born 1567: Lichfield, Staffordshire.

Edmund Gennings was brought up, like his younger brother John, as a Protestant. Reputedly a rather serious youth, he was inspired by mysticism and theology. At sixteen years of age Edmund was sent as page to Richard Sherwood, a Catholic gentleman. Sherwood followed his vocation to be a priest and entered the English college at Rheims, where he was ordained. He returned to England in 1584, to take up his mission. Edmund was much impressed by his master's devotion and converted to the Catholic faith in the same year.

Young Edmund later followed in Richard Sherwood's footsteps and travelled to Rheims to study at the English College. Shortly after beginning his studies however, he developed tuberculosis. Whether in preparation for a return to England, or for the sake of his health, is unclear; but Edmund was sent to Le Havre before completion at Rheims. At Le Havre, it was said he made a 'miraculous recovery' from the disease, thus he returned to his studies at Rheims. Canon Law decreed that Edmund, at twenty-three, was still too young for ordination; but in 1590 he was ordained by special dispensation and began his mission in England.

Wanting to see his family, Edmund went to Lichfield but discovered all but his brother John had died. John had removed to London and Edmund set out to find him. When eventually they met, Edmund hoped that he could persuade John to the Catholic faith, but John, probably fearful of the fate which some Catholics suffered, would not be moved. They parted with promises to meet again.

Edmund had barely begun his mission, when he was arrested by the notorious Richard Topcliffe on 8th November 1591.

Mass was being celebrated in an upstairs room at Swithun Wells' house in London, when Topcliffe and his men burst in. The small congregation held the door of the room firm until Mass was finished; Topcliffe immediately took the group, which included Edmund, Mrs. Wells and Polydore Plasden who was sharing the Mass.

They were indicted at Westminster on 4th and condemned on the 5th or 6th of December. Mrs. Wells was later reprieved and died in prison in 1602. Edmund was hanged, drawn and quartered outside Swithun Wells' house at Gray's Inn Lane on 10th December 1591.

Edmund's brother was later so affected by Edmund's martyrdom that he converted to the Catholic faith, was ordained and took orders as a Franciscan. In 1614 at St. Omer, John Gennings published Edmund's biography in which he chides himself, saying:

I rejoiced rather than bewailed the untimely and bloody end of my nearest kinsman, hoping thereby to be rid of all persuasions which I suspected I should receive from him touching the Catholic Religion.