

ST. LUCY – PRAY FOR US

SANCTA LUCIA ORA PRO NOBIS. We honour today the virgin-martyr Lucy from Syracuse in Sicily, who gave her life for Christ and His Church in the year 304 during the persecution of Diocletian. Her life and example so caught the imagination of the Early Church that by the time of Pope Gregory, her name was included in the Roman Canon of the Mass. Not unlike St. Agatha from nearby Catania, and our own St. Cecilia, we know little that's reliable about her. The tradition is that Lucy was a young girl who dedicated herself to chastity for the sake of the Kingdom of God. But her refusal of suitors, on account of her Christian faith, led to her being handed over to the authorities. Having survived violation in a brothel, and an attempt to burn her, she was put to death by the sword. In mediaeval times, much was made of the tradition that her eyes were gouged out and then miraculously restored, and so she became patron saint of those with problems of the eye. When I was a full-time hospital chaplain, I always used to give patients in the eye-clinic the blessing of St. Lucy. So let us pray today for the blind, and those losing their sight.

I THE LORD YOUR GOD, I AM HOLDING YOU BY THE RIGHT HAND. I TELL YOU, DO NOT BE AFRAID. I WILL TURN THE WILDERNESS INTO A LAKE AND DRY GROUND INTO A WATER-SPRING. Those beautiful words of hope from Deutero-Isaiah in that 1stR remind us that we venerate St. Lucy within the season of Advent. The days are still getting shorter and will not get longer until after Christmas: after Christ has come, the Light of the World. But like the moon that reflects the light of the sun, so the faith and witness of Lucy guides us through the darkness of these challenging times to the dawn of light. In contemporary culture, people balk when you mention virginity or chastity. Indeed, to be a Catholic, let alone a religious or a bishop, is to be out on a limb. It's as if our land is religiously a desert. Yet as pastoral experience confirms, water often runs underneath, which is why this Year of Faith is a wonderful opportunity. Let us ask St. Lucy to pray for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit that faith in God may come to the surface and flourish. Indeed, may St. Lucy, a light in the darkness, pray for the conversion of England.

Recently, the government reiterated its intention to introduce same-sex marriages: you may have seen the press statement I made, as Bishop of the Diocese, in reaction to this. It's interesting that in Indo-European languages, knowing is generally associated with seeing, sight, looking. Of course, philosophically knowing is a much more complex activity than simply seeing. It's a compound of activities, which the great 20C Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan in his book Insight, summed up as a threefold set of steps: experiencing, understanding and judging. Unlike the Truth which sets us free, error enslaves and puts us in the dark. Much of the current thinking on gay marriage is muddled, with potentially catastrophic consequences for the health and behaviour of future generations. Indeed, the darkness we face here is not just the loss of God but the loss of Man, of what it means to be human. This is why England badly needs the Gospel of Christ we proclaim. So in this Mass, in which Christ lays down his life for us, let us pray, through the intercession of St. Lucy, for our fellow countrymen and women that they may find Christ, and in Him the truth about being human. And let us pray for ourselves, that the example of Lucy the martyr may encourage us to remain faithful to our vocation as priests, religious and laity. May we persevere in giving witness to Christ, no matter what the cost.