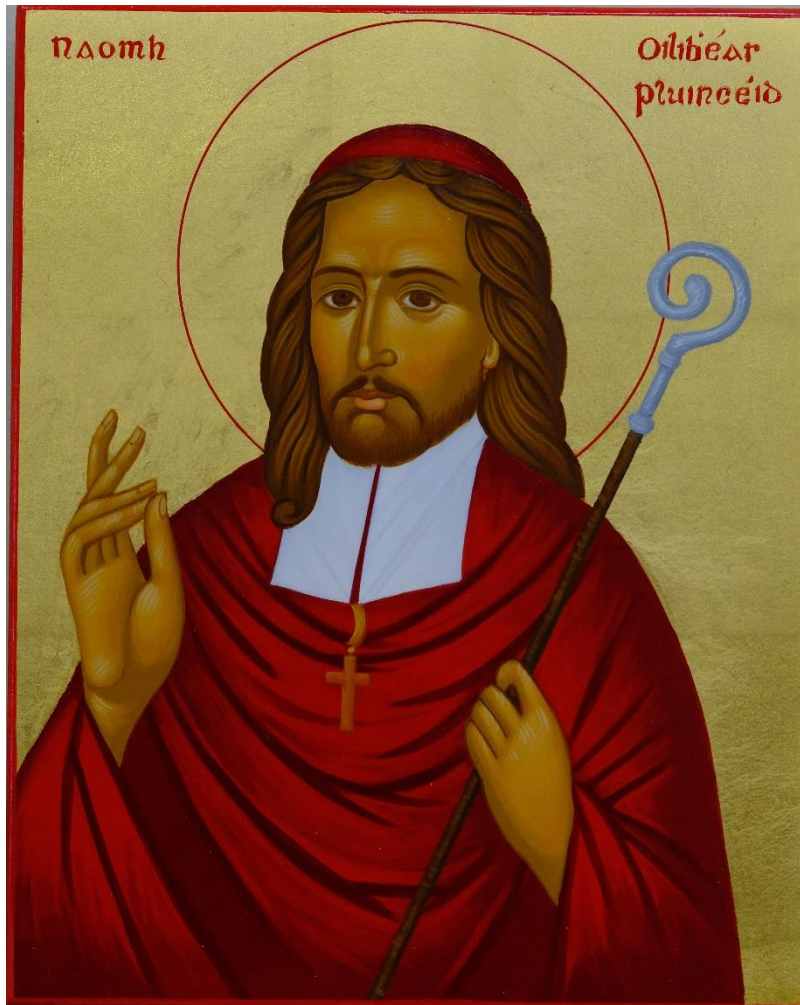


**Address by Archbishop Eamon Martin
Launch of Saint Oliver400
in Saint Peter's Jubilee Church, Drogheda
12 Feb 2025**



Icon image of Saint Oliver Plunkett (courtesy of Father Eugene Sweeney, Parish Priest of Saint Peter's Jubilee Church, Drogheda, Co Louth, in the Archdiocese of Armagh)

Back in the summer of 2019, on the 350th anniversary of the appointment of Saint Oliver Plunkett as Archbishop of Armagh, I was honoured to unveil a brand new sculpture of Saint Oliver in our Cathedral dedicated to Christian martyrs of “yesterday, today and tomorrow”.

When I pulled off the red cloth to unveil the sculpture by the artist, Dony McManus, I was immediately struck by the way the sculpted face evokes Oliver's courage and serenity in face of such awful condemnation and suffering. It is as if you see in Saint Oliver's face, the face of Jesus.

Fifty years ago, at his canonisation on 12 October 1975, Pope Paul VI said that Saint Oliver is “for the entire world, an authentic and outstanding example of the love of Christ ... He laid down his life out of love, and thereby freely associated himself in an intimate manner with the sufferings of Christ.”

Historians tell us that Archbishop Oliver was a devoted and loving shepherd, attentive to the sanctification of his clergy and faithful, and enthusiastic for the education and Christian instruction of young people, especially here in Drogheda.

Nowhere of course has kept the memory of Saint Oliver alive like this historic town of Drogheda. Today, as we launch this anniversary year #Oliver400 I say, thank you Drogheda!

Thank you in a special way to the Dominican sisters of the Siena convent who lovingly received the precious relic of the head of Saint Oliver Plunkett, and tenderly cared for it over several centuries – often in secret, sometimes in peril of their own safety – but always surrounding this sacred relic with reverence and contemplation.

Thank you to the people of Drogheda – your ancestors – who not only welcomed and protected Archbishop Oliver, but who also provided hospitality and welcome for many others of my predecessor archbishops of Armagh down through the centuries.

Thank you to the town of Drogheda for also providing a first home to multiple religious congregations of sisters, brothers and priests – Franciscans, Dominicans, Presentation Sisters, Medical Missionaries of Mary, Augustinians and so many others – who made a massive contribution to community, education, health and faith throughout this region and beyond.

Thank you to the people and priests of Drogheda who built this beautiful church of Saint Peter with its hallowed shrine – fit for the relics of a saint.

I had no hesitation whatsoever in naming Saint Peter’s Church Drogheda as a ‘jubilee church’ for this holy year, 2025, alongside Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in Armagh. I pray this will bring many visitors and abundant graces and blessings to Drogheda and a sense of new life, community cooperation and hope for this historic and strategically important town which has endured many challenges in recent years.

In 1979 another saint, Pope Saint John Paul II who, as Cardinal of Cracow, had been to Oliver’s canonisation, came here to the vicinity of Drogheda to venerate the new saint’s relics and bring his own message of peace.

There he said: Saint Oliver “was the defender of the oppressed and the advocate of justice, but he would never condone violence. For men of violence, his word was the word of the Apostle Peter: “Never pay back one wrong with another” (*1 Pt 3 :9*).

And this is so true. At the gallows in Tyburn, London, in 1681, Oliver said: “I do heartily forgive them (my accusers), and also the judges, ...and I also forgive all those who had a hand in bringing me from Ireland to be tried here, where it is morally impossible for me to have a fair trial. I do finally forgive all who did concur directly or indirectly to take away my life; and I ask forgiveness of all those whom I ever offended by thought, word or deed”.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is clear that Archbishop Oliver, by his life and his death, had become “conformed to the likeness of Christ” (*Romans 8:29*). When you look upon the face of Oliver – his actual face here at the shrine, or his recreated sculpted face in Armagh – you are gazing upon the face of Christ.

I trust that those who come to this Church during this jubilee year to gaze upon the sacred relic of the head of Saint Oliver, or who visit our Cathedral of Saint Patrick in Armagh and look up at the face of Saint Oliver in his statue there, will gain some of Saint Oliver’s serenity, courage, wisdom and hope, both for themselves and for others.

My prayer at this launch of #Oliver400 is that Saint Oliver Plunkett will inspire all who visit Saint Peter’s Church, Drogheda, this year, so that they will leave feeling stronger in their faith, firmer in their hope and committed to reach out to others in charity, peace and reconciliation.

Thank you Mayor, Councillors and members of Louth County Council, dear young people, guests and friends for making this morning so special by your presence. I look forward to returning here to celebrate Saint Oliver’s feast with you later in the year.

Saint Oliver Plunkett. Pray for Drogheda. Pray for us all. Amen.

ENDS