

Hugh Latimer & Nicholas Ridley, Bishops and Martyrs (1555)

Observed 16 October



The beginnings of Anglicanism are fraught with sincere religious fervor and lamentable violence. Among the fervent leaders of those beginnings were Bishops Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, and Nicholas Ridley, called the Oxford Martyrs. They died in the terrible shocking spectacle of Christians slaying other Christians over differences in politics, theology, and liturgy. There was absolute sincerity on both sides, and a deep desire to be faithful to the Gospel, but surely a deficient grasp of the teachings of the Prince of Peace.

Latimer and Ridley were conscientious churchmen, considering seriously the questions of faith and worship that shook the world of England and all Europe in their days. They moved from dedicated devotion to the church as they had always known it to a reformed faith, moved by the ideas of the reformers, and especially by the need for Scripture and worship in a language that all people could understand. As priests and preachers, later bishops, their opinions on these matters drew public attention. Had the church not been part of the government, there might have been disputes and recriminations without trials and executions. But the Church of England was entangled with the state, so to disagree with the church as the monarch wishes it to be amounted to treason. The men's favor rose and fell as monarchs changed. They were influential during the reign of young Edward VI, but after his death, Queen Mary's faith and political ambitions demanded a restoration of allegiance to Rome. And so, many leaders of the English Reformation, including Latimer and Ridley, faithful preachers and liturgists, striving for the education and edification of the people, were sentenced to death for heresy (in fact for standing against the wishes of the monarch.) As they went to the stake together, Latimer is said to have remarked to Ridley, "Be of good cheer, Master Ridley, and play the man, for we shall this day light such a candle in England as I trust by God's grace shall never be put out." – which is surely true. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, principal author of the Book of Common Prayer, is the third of the Oxford Martyrs, but now is observed on his own feast day on March 21st, commemorating his execution some five months after Latimer and Ridley. Together their faithful lives of scholarship and service continue to inspire from the midst of an appalling time of religious violence in which people were killed in the name of faith but for the cause of politics.

Lessons Zephaniah 3:1-5; Psalm 142; I Corinthians 3:9-14; John 15:20-16:1

Collect Keep us, O Lord, constant in faith and zealous in witness, after the examples of your servants Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley; that we may live in your fear, die in your favor, and rest in your peace; for the sake of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.