

Blessed Dominic Collins SJ (1566–1602)

31 October marks the feast day of Blessed Dominic Collins SJ. Jesuit historian **Fergus O’Donoghue SJ** traces the life story of this Blessed from his early days in Youghal through the European wars of religion to his return to Youghal a prisoner of Elizabeth I.

Dominic Collins was born circa 1566 in Youghal, County Cork, an important English-speaking town on the southern coast of Ireland. His father and his brother were mayors of the town, so he came from a respected family. His mother’s family was Irish speaking, so Dominic grew up bilingually and picked up other languages very quickly. He had some contact with the Jesuits, because there was a small Jesuit school in Youghal for a short time during his childhood.

There were many political tensions in the region. Religious conflict deepened in Ireland when the government of Queen Elizabeth I extended its authority throughout the country and attempted to impose Protestantism. In 1560, the Irish parliament had passed the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity, making the Queen head of the Church and declaring that the Book of Common Prayer was the only legal form of worship. There was

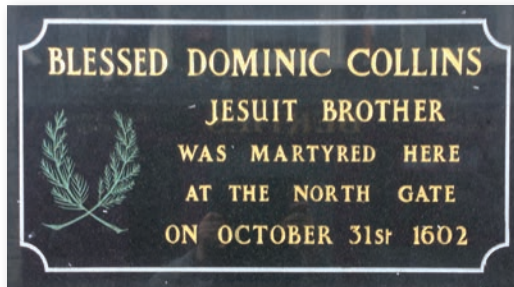
widespread and successful resistance to this policy.

Dominic could not envisage a career in his own country; he went to Brittany at the age of twenty. He worked there for three years as a servant in two inns at Nantes, and saved the money needed to outfit himself as a soldier. He then joined the Catholic League’s armies and served as an officer in the French wars of religion for nine years.

Realising that the League did not have a future, Dominic left Brittany and retired to La Coruna, where there was a long-established Irish community.

He received a good pension from the Spanish Crown and lived very comfortably, with two servants.

Despite having retired in comfort, Dominic had no inner peace. He went to various friars for confession and mentioned his attraction to the religious life. All of them offered him a place in their novitiates and a path to priesthood. Meeting Fr Thomas White, an Irish Jesuit, he declared



that he found consolation only with the thought of being a Jesuit brother. Dominic had been impressed by the Jesuits he had met as military chaplains in Flanders, France and Spain.

The Jesuit Provincial of Castile was impressed by the character of this solid Irishman, but he wanted him to be sure of his vocation to the Society. He asked Dominic to wait. After eight months, he was admitted to the novitiate at the Jesuit college of Santiago de Compostela on 8 December 1598. He made a great impression during his first probation, with his handsome looks and his beautiful clothes. Soon, as a novice, he worked as a nurse, a cook and a handyman. When the house was hit by plague, all the healthy Jesuits fled and Dominic remained, nursing the seven Jesuits affected, one of whom died. Everyone was impressed by his courage as well as by his 'obstinacy' (or determination).

Dominic made his first vows on 4 February 1601. A few months later he returned to Ireland. Fr James Archer, another Irish Jesuit, had requested him. Fr Archer supported the cause of O' Neill and O' Donnell, two Irish chieftains in revolt against Elizabeth I; they had obtained the help of Philip II of Spain. Br Collins sailed from Lisbon on 3 September 1601. He and Fr Archer had never met; they travelled on two different ships, and Dominic's ship took much longer to reach Ireland.

The two Irish Jesuits met for the first time in January 1602 on the southern



Irish coast, near Castlehaven. The Irish and Spanish forces had just been defeated by the English army at Kinsale, an important port town in County Cork. Fr Archer and Br Collins stayed to help O'Sullivan Beare, the local Irish chieftain, defend his castle at Dunboy. Fr Archer left Dunboy Castle shortly before the English besieged it. Resistance was futile, so Dominic, who had not taken part in the fighting, surrendered on the evening of 17 June 1602. He



In 1560, the Irish parliament had passed the Act of Supremacy. His family tried to convince him to become a Protestant, while remaining Catholic in his heart. He refused.

become a Protestant, while remaining Catholic in his heart. He refused. On 31 October 1602 Dominic was taken on the fifty two kilometre journey to his hometown of Youghal for execution, as part of the official policy of intimidation, because the townsfolk knew him and all his family. A poor fisherman was forced to carry out the sentence, while the soldiers contained the small crowd. None of the Collins family was present.

Dominic insisted on wearing his Jesuit cassock on the scaffold. He addressed the onlookers saying that he had come to Ireland to preach the Catholic faith and that he would be happy to die a thousand times for it. Dominic was hanged and his body was left in the gallows for three or four hours. The townsfolk did not want his naked body to be left there; they took him away in the middle of the night and buried him in a secret place. Many immediately recognised him as a martyr for the faith.

Dominic Collins was beatified by Pope John Paul II on 27 September 1992. ❤️

was almost the only prisoner not immediately executed. He was taken to Cork, the regional capital, and tried by a court martial. Dominic was questioned at length, but, even when threatened with torture, he refused to give any vital information.

Surprisingly, Dominic was kept alive for four months. It was hoped that he would give some information, then enter the queen's service as an army officer and become a Protestant. His family tried to convince him to