

This resource has been produced by the St Vincent de Paul Society. The St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) is a Catholic international volunteer organisation whose members work with anyone in need in their local community – the homeless, the elderly, prisoners, struggling families, people who are sick and lonely. Young people are an important part of the Vincentian family. We are all called to be like Jesus by helping people, becoming their friend and working with others to make a difference. Find out more and view our school resources by visiting **svp.org.uk/youth-svp**

May: The English Martyrs, St Louise de Marillac, St Philip Neri & Mary
The Ones Who Stood Firm, The One Who Got Organised, The One Who Brought Joy & The One Who Made the Journey

4 May - The English Martyrs
9 May - St Louise de Marillac
26 May - St Philip Neri
31 May - The Visitation of Mary

Love That Goes the Distance

May. A month of bank holidays, hopefully a bit of sunshine and plenty of flowers appearing around statues of Mary!

May is traditionally dedicated to Mary, but this month we also meet people who remind us that faith takes courage, compassion, joy and action. Faith isn't just something we believe. It's something that should get us moving.

The English Martyrs lived at a time when being Catholic in England could cost you your freedom or even your life. Among them was St Margaret Clitherow, a wife and mother from York who sheltered Catholic priests when doing so was illegal. Their stories remind us how precious freedom of religion and conscience really is. Nobody should have to hide what they believe to feel safe.

Then there's St Louise de Marillac, who knew that wanting to help people was one thing, but making it happen was another! Louise struggled with anxiety, self-doubt and uncertainty, yet alongside St Vincent de Paul, she helped establish the Daughters of Charity, bringing practical help to people who were poor, sick or forgotten.

She was a brilliant organiser who turned compassion into action. Louise reminds us that we don't have to feel confident or have everything sorted to make a difference. Sometimes kindness needs a plan, a few willing volunteers and somebody who remembers the biscuits!

Next comes St Philip Neri. If you imagine saints as permanently serious people who never cracked a smile, Philip might surprise you! Living in sixteenth-century Rome, he was known for his humour, warmth and friendship, particularly with young people and those who felt forgotten. Philip believed joy could bring people closer to God and that sometimes the holiest thing we can do is make somebody smile. A shared laugh or a simple act of inclusion can change somebody's whole day.

Finally, there's Mary. We often see her in statues, looking peaceful, with her hands folded and everything beautifully arranged. But the Mary we meet in the Gospels is far more animated!

She was a young woman facing an uncertain future who said yes to God without knowing how everything would work out. When Mary discovered that her older relative Elizabeth was also pregnant, she set off to visit her. Mary had plenty going on herself. A fairly enormous life change, you might say! But she didn't wait until life was less complicated before making time for somebody else.

Mary didn't arrive with all the answers. She brought herself, her time, her friendship and her willingness to help. When Elizabeth welcomed her, Mary sang the Magnificat, a song about a God who lifts up the lowly, feeds the hungry and challenges the powerful. Its words have been considered so radical that there are stories of authorities trying to silence them. Not quite the quiet, harmless Mary we sometimes imagine! Mary reminds us that faith can be both gentle and courageous. It notices the person in front of us while challenging the things that make life unfair.

Four different stories. The Martyrs stood firm. Louise got organised. Philip brought joy. Mary made the journey.

Different people, different gifts, but each understood that faith was something to be lived, not simply talked about.



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Reflection Questions

1. St Philip Neri believed laughter and joy could bring people closer together. What's the funniest thing that's happened to you recently, or what's your favourite joke?
2. Mary's Magnificat was a song with something powerful to say about the world. If you could choose a song whose words or music speak to you what would it be and why?
3. St Louise de Marillac didn't always feel confident, but she didn't let that stop her making a difference. Can you think of a time when you felt nervous or unsure about something but gave it a go anyway? What happened?

Optional Personal Challenge:

This month, find out about one of the other English Martyrs. There are plenty of extraordinary stories, from ordinary people to those who risked their lives helping others practise their faith.
Choose somebody you haven't heard of before. Find out who they were, what they stood for and what their story might teach us today. We don't have to face the same dangers to share their courage. Sometimes it begins with deciding what matters enough to stand up for.