Saint Margaret Ward • Saint stories

The story behind this saint needs a little history lesson first. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I in England, 1558-1603, it was illegal to practice the Catholic faith. If a Catholic priest was caught by the government, he was brutally tortured and then executed. Also, if you were caught hiding or helping a priest, you would suffer a similar fate. Priests still came to England to serve the needs of the faithful, and many people helped them. This is the story about one of those who helped Catholic priests, Saint Margaret Ward. But we will get to her story shortly.

“Father Watson, you are under arrest for being a Catholic priest and saying Mass in England. You will suffer horribly for these acts.”

And so Father Watson was arrested and treated very cruelly. After torturing him, he was put into the prison at the Tower of London. While he still felt weak and in pain, some Protestant (non-Catholic) ministers came to talk to him.

These Protestant ministers said, “If you will just come to the Church of England and say you no longer believe in the Catholic faith, they will let you go.”

Feeling so lousy, Father agreed. “Anything to get out of here.” And so, Father Watson attended a service at the Church of England and declared, “I am no longer a Catholic.”

Immediately following that, Father Watson felt guilty. “It was wrong of me to deny my faith. I must go to confession.”

And so he did. The priest he confessed to was very compassionate. However, he insisted that Father Watson return to that church and state how wrong he was for saying he no

longer believed the Catholic faith. Father Watson did this and received forgiveness for that sin. But, the government arrested Father Watson again and put him back in jail.

While once again suffering in prison, his faith began to sway.

Now, here is where Margaret Ward comes into the story.

Margaret heard about Father Watson and knew he needed encouragement to not give up his faith. It took a while, but she eventually was able to convince his jailer to let her visit with Father Watson. Each time she came to visit Father, she brought a basket of food for the prisoner. Before entering the cell, the jailer always searched her basket but only food was ever in it. Eventually, the jailer stopped searching the basket.

One day Father Watson confided to Margaret an idea he had.

“If I could get a long rope, I could climb out of this tower and down to the river. Then if a boat happened to be there, I could row away and escape! Do you think you could help me?”

The two discussed all the possibilities.

“Next time I come,” said Margaret. “I will bring a rope. I also will make arrangements for a boat to meet you.”

The next time Margaret came for a visit she brought the basket of food with the rope hidden in it. Fortunately, the basket wasn’t searched.

“A boat will be waiting for you at the time we talked about. Good luck. I will be praying for you,” said Margaret before she left.

When the appointed time arrived, Father tied the rope to something sturdy in his cell and began to climb down. Alas, the rope wasn’t long enough! He didn’t have the strength to climb back up so he just let go of the rope and came crashing

down—he broke his arm and leg in the fall. The people in the boat below were able to get him aboard and row away without being caught. But with all the craziness that was going on with him falling and getting injured, the rope was left behind!!! It was obvious then to the jailer how Father escaped and where he had received the rope. (Margaret had been his only visitor.) Margaret Ward was arrested for helping Father Richard Watson to escape. She was offered her freedom if she would tell the authorities where the priest was hiding and if she would attend the Church of England. She refused to do either. Margaret was tortured and killed for helping a priest.

Feast day: August 30

Saint Margaret Ward, pray for us!

Activity: Bake for your priest!

Time to do some baking! With an adult, bake some muffins or other bread and bring it to your pastor at your parish. Share with him the story about St. Margaret Ward. If you are unable to bring it to your church, share your baking with your family, or a neighbor. Make sure to share the brave story of Saint Margaret Ward.