

- 1 From 1664, London suffered for 3 years from the Great Plague - a name given to the deadly bubonic plague. On this day in 1665 a parcel of cloth from London arrived at the house of a tailor in the Derbyshire village of Eyam. The pieces of cloth were damp, and so were spread out in the house to dry. A few days later, George Vickers (the tailor) became very ill and died. Soon the other members of his family died, and the infection began to spread through the village, killing others.
- 2 William Mompesson (the vicar) gathered the people together. He urged them not to leave the village, as that would only spread the deadly plague and would kill thousands. With great courage, the villagers decided to stay. They put up notices on the roads to warn others to keep away. They arranged for people in other villages to leave food at certain places, paid for by money left in running water or in bowls of vinegar.
- 3 Month by month, families buried relatives killed by the bubonic plague. One day the vicar's wife, Catherine, mentioned that the air had a sweet smell - but the vicar was horrified: that was one of the first signs of having the plague. She was one of 259 to die of plague in the small village of 350 people - 74% of them died. We can only begin to imagine the experiences of the villagers in those 13 months after the plague arrived in that bundle of cloth from London.

4 *Let us pray:*


**Lord Jesus,
the bravery and courage
and self-sacrifice
of the villagers of Eyam
remind us of your words
that there is no greater love
than for someone**


**to lay down their life
for their friends.**


Jn 15¹²


**We pray for courage
when difficult times come upon us.
We pray, too, for the generosity
to think of others before ourselves.
Amen.**




 *For the Great Plague, see also 26 Feb and 21 Aug. The timing of the Great Plague of London (1664-6) should not be confused with the Black Death (also bubonic plague) which raged throughout Europe in the mid 1300s.*

 *After their long 13 months, the surviving villagers made a huge bonfire of all their clothes and bedding and furniture, and they fumigated their houses - all to make sure that nothing of the disease remained. 11th October 1666 saw the last death from bubonic plague in the village. Every year since then, a religious service has been held in Eyam on that date in thanksgiving for the courage and self-sacrifice of the villagers.*

 *Why did the villagers of Eyam leave their money in vinegar or running water? Why did some people think that the Great Fire of London in 1666 was a blessing in disguise?*

 *A nursery rhyme tells of some symptoms of the bubonic plague:
"Ring-a-ring o' roses, A pocket full of posies,
A-tishoo! A-tishoo! We all fall down."
Marked rings on the skin that resembled roses were a sign of the plague, along with repeated sneezing. The custom of saying "Bless you" after someone has sneezed, stems from when sneezing was observed as one of the early symptoms of the plague. "A pocket full of posies" may refer either to another symptom (the victim seeming to detect a sweet smell in the air) or the practice of carrying posies of scented flowers (or a pomander of fruit and cloves) thought to ward off illness or at least any unpleasant smells. The symptoms led on to death: "We all fall down", says the nursery rhyme.*

 Christ be beside me; Lay your hands

This is an excerpt from the page of this date in
'Praying Each Day of the Year',
a 3-volume book
by Nicholas Hutchinson, FSC.

For details:

<http://www.matthew-james.co.uk/>

Could make use of a search engine
to research this topic further.

This material is part of
the prayer and education website
of the De La Salle Brothers
in Great Britain:

www.prayingeachday.org