

MAY DAY CROWNING OF OUR LADY

When I was between 8 and 12 years old, one of the annual things I enjoyed was the May Procession of our parishioners from our church to a nearby convent, about 200 yards away. The nuns had made a grotto at the end of a huge lawn, where we all gathered. In this was a statue of Our Lady, and it was here that a girl between eight and nine years old would crown Our Lady with flowers using May blossoms.

This was all just after the Second World War in the South Yorkshire mining town of Wath-on-Deerne. I always remember it as a truly spectacular event.

I have not seen or heard of this example of faith since our family moved from that village in my late teens. I'm now in my eighties, and I still remember that wonderful hymn BRING FLOWERS OF THE RAREST and especially that chorus:

Chorus:

O Mary we crown thee with blossoms today,
Queen of the Angels, and Queen of the May,
O Mary, we crown thee with blossoms today,
Queen of the Angels, and Queen of the May,

Unfortunately, I can only remember the first two verses, which are:

Bring flowers of the rarest, bring flowers of the fairest,
From garden and woodland, and hillside and vale;
Our full hearts are swelling, our glad voices telling
The praise of the loveliest Rose of the dale. [Chorus]

Our voices ascending, in harmony blending,
Oh thus may our hearts turn, dear Mother, to thee;
Oh thus shall we prove thee how truly we love thee,
How dark, without Mary, life's journey would be. [Chorus]

I remember the parts of this ceremony, but they can change slightly from parish to parish. What I remember are:

There was a procession of parishioners from the church to the convent, where we would find the grotto made by the nuns. During the procession, a young boy carried the crown of May Flowers on a white cushion. At the grotto, while the above hymn was being sung, the young girl took the crown of flowers from the cushion and performed the actual coronation on Our Lady's statue. The boy and girl were always dressed in white clothes made by the nuns. It is a truly wonderful memory.

I was reminded of all this when my wife recently told me a story about it. She ran an art shop for a charity she worked for in Warrington, where paintings of unknown local artists of all ages were displayed and sold. She said an elderly woman had brought in some paintings for consideration but was late for a date with her granddaughter, who was crowning Our Lady, the Queen of the May, that afternoon.

My wife said it caused her to remember the ceremony, and she could not help but sing the above chorus. However, she told the woman she'd forgotten the verses.

Later that afternoon, the elderly lady returned and presented my wife with a printed copy of all the verses given out at the ceremony to all present. I've wondered if this beautiful ceremony to Our Lady is still practised in parishes nationwide.