

**A short biography of
Father Thomas Byles,
Parish Priest of Ongar, Essex.**

(1870-1912)

Roussel Davids Byles (Thomas was the name chosen when he was baptised in the Catholic Church) was born in Headingley, Leeds, Yorkshire on the 26th February 1870. Following his brother William's conversion he also became a Catholic on the 23rd May 1894 in Oxford. Shortly after his conversion he discerned a calling to the priesthood and studied at seminaries in Oscott and Ware in England, and finally at the Beda college in Rome. He was ordained in the Church of Saint Apollinaris in Rome on the 15th June 1902 where he first exercised his priestly ministry before moving back to the U.K. to serve in Kelvedon and Ongar in Essex where he was known as a humble, devoted pastor and a very able preacher.

Father Thomas was asked to celebrate his brother's wedding in New York and so, on the 10th April 1912, he boarded the Titanic. On the morning of Sunday the 14th April he preached a sermon where he referred to prayer and the sacraments as being lifeboats back to God. When the ship hit a large iceberg he made his way to various decks on the ship helping people board the lifeboats, heard confessions, gave absolution, prayed the rosary and prepared people to meet God. Father Thomas refused offers of a place in a lifeboat, sacrificing his life so that others would be saved, and enabling him to help those left on the ship. Eyewitnesses said they heard Father Thomas praying with the people on the ship as it sunk into the icy depths.

In a sermon by Monsignor Watson preached at a Requiem mass for Father Thomas he was described as a man of "great learning and great zeal, who possessed a kindly love for the poor and a spirit of great humility."

Father Thomas' brother William and his wife later travelled to Rome where they were granted a private audience with Pope Saint Pius X who said that he was "a martyr for the Church."

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Father Thomas Byles



"Our prayers and the sacraments of the church
are spiritual lifeboats taking us back to God"

*Theme of the last homily given on the
Titanic by Fr. Thomas Byles on the
morning of Low Sunday April 14th 1912*

Prayer for the beatification of Father Thomas Byles

God our Father, protector of those in peril,
you called your priest Father Thomas Byles
to provide spiritual lifeboats for the souls of
those in need, by his pastoral care. Through the
example of his life and virtue may we follow
your son Jesus Christ more closely fulfilling his
commandments of self sacrifice, charity and
building up his Body which is the Church. Let
the inspiration of your servant prompt us to
greater confidence in your mercy and love for
us. We humbly ask that you glorify your servant
Father Thomas Byles on earth according to the
design your holy will. Through his intercession
grant the favour I now present (here make your
request) through Christ our Lord, Amen.

**Our Father, Hail Mary,
Glory be to the Father.**

(Prayer composed with ecclesiastical approval)

Please report all favours received to:

Fr. Graham Smith fr.gjdsmith@gmail.com



Diocese of Brentwood