

Monday Week 14 of Ordinary Time

Feast of Sts John Fisher (1469 - 1535) and Thomas More (1477 - 1535)

Eleazar, aged 90, was not expected to stand firm in the face of martyrdom, but he did (2 Maccabees 6:19). Like St. Polycarp in the mid-2nd Century, who was martyred at 84, age, or ill-health, are no barrier to defending one's faith. Both St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher were prominent men in the government under King Henry VIII. St. John Fisher was chancellor of the University of Cambridge, and bishop of Rochester. He wrote much against the errors and corruption into which the Church had fallen but was opposed to Lutheranism, both in its doctrine and in its ideas of reform. Defending the validity of King Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon led to a brief imprisonment, but his great test was in refusing to assent to Henry VIII's self-declaration as head of the Church in England. St. John Fisher was the only English bishop to oppose Henry VIII's actions, on the grounds that they were a repudiation of papal authority, and for this St. John Fisher, already old and ill, was imprisoned in the Tower, and was executed, a sick and weak man, no longer able to walk, a month after the Pope made him a cardinal.

St Thomas More was a layman, a lawyer and a close friend of Henry VIII who made him Lord Chancellor, the highest legal position in England. When Henry VIII demanded a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, St. Thomas More opposed him. He resigned the chancellorship in 1532 and retired from public life; but he could not retire from his reputation, and so it was demanded that he take the oath to support the Act of Succession, which effectively repudiated papal religious authority. He refused and was also imprisoned in the Tower of London. After the execution of John Fisher, he was tried on the charge of high treason for denying the King's supreme headship of the Church, found guilty, and sentenced to death. He went to his execution, on 6 July 1535, with a clear conscience and a light heart; he told the spectators that he was still "the king's good servant – but God's first," and carefully adjusted his beard before he was beheaded.

Both men teach us that the importance of faithfulness to the Truth. Whilst in England to today we may not be called to give up our lives for Christ, as Fr Naz said in his homily yesterday, we need to have courage and accept the challenge of witnessing to Christ in our every day lives. Let's conclude with the collect from today's Mass:

God of truth and justice, by whose grace
your servants Saints John Fisher and Thomas
More stood forth as champions of your Church
in this land, grant us, we pray, by their
example and prayers, that following always a
good conscience and holding fast to the truth
we may at the last meet merrily with them

and be partakers for ever in the inheritance of
your saints in light.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

With thanks to <https://universalis.com/> for the information on the saints.

Carol Ann Harnett 22nd June 2020