

Tuesday Reflection 22 June 2021

Today the Church commemorates the Saints John Fisher and Thomas More, both put to death under Henry VIII for opposing the King's marital undertakings and his setting himself up as Supreme Head of the Church in England.

We commemorate these two saints for their principled stand against what they saw as the abuse of power by a temporal ruler.

We must remember that these were troubled times; the Protestant Reformation was in full swing and violence was being perpetrated on both sides in the name of religion. There were martyrs on both sides; on both sides, people were put to death for standing up for what they thought was right; it was not a case of heroic Catholics on the one side and perfidious Protestants on the other. Only one year after the execution of John Fisher and Thomas More, the scholar and Bible translator William Tyndale was executed in the Netherlands where he had fled after opposing Henry VIII's annulment of his marriage.

Fisher, More and Tyndale were all respected scholars, associates of Erasmus of Rotterdam; their journeys took different paths, but all ended on the scaffold.

Their deaths are a call for tolerance and acceptance of others' good faith. John Fisher wrote: "I condemn no man's conscience; their conscience may save them, and mine must save me".

In all the controversies in which we engage, let us treat our opponents as if they are acting in good faith, no matter what motives we may attribute to them. Truth is seldom a matter of black or white.

We can only learn and grow by engaging with the other and accepting that it has its own validity.

And finally, let us remember, as the examples of Fisher, More and Tyndale demonstrate, that though violence might terminate an argument, it does not resolve it.

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