

New Brighton, Sunday 9th July 2023

Ss Thomas More & John Fisher

6th Sunday after Pentecost

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

“I die the King's good servant, and God's first.”¹

We celebrate today two English Martyrs, who had to give the supreme testimony of fidelity to the King of Heaven, instead of betraying Him for a king on Earth. On the 22nd June and 6th July of the same year 1535, St John Fisher and St Thomas More were sentenced to death by King Henry VIII, for their constant opposition to his divorce with Queen Catherine of Aragon and his self-proclamation as Supreme Head of the Church of England.

The model they most probably considered at their time, and which is used for the reading of the epistle of this mass, is of the old man Eleazar, in the 2nd book of the Maccabees, who was asked to disobey God's law by the enemy of Israel and refused. He was even invited to simulate, for sparing his life, due to his old age, but refused even more, as per the wrong example he would give to the young generations, who would not know about this simulation. He preferred to suffer death and to be at peace with his conscience.²

It is said that at the time of his martyrdom, St John Fisher was compared to his Patron saint, St John the Baptist, as they both opposed to their king for him to remarry with another wife, while the first marriage was still in force. And both of them were beheaded by the will of an unjust and lustful king.

The example of fidelity we are offered to contemplate this morning is the supreme way to accomplish our salvation, like they did, and many others before and after them. Most probably we will not be asked to accomplish this sacrifice. Instead, we are most surely asked to remain steadfast in our Faith and duties, which can be a real challenge in the non-christian world such as ours.

St Thomas More and St John Fisher were quite lonely in their courage, as unfortunately many others accepted to bow their head to the foolish wills of a king. Our society is leaving God and Faith more and more apart, forgetting about its heritage and legacy. In the 4th-5th centuries, there was a time when England was one of the last strongholds of the catholic faith, while heresies were dividing the small European Christendom. But where has it gone now?

Do not let yourself going to despair, looking at today's world, lamenting and weeping, saying and repeating without end: “What can men do against such reckless hate?”

Hold fast the Faith of our ancestors! Hold fast the traditions inherited from them!

Our testimony of fidelity will truly follow the example of our two English martyrs, if we accept the constant and highly demanding sacrifice of fidelity to our Christian duty. The Little Flower, who is so dear to our hearts, named this lively sacrifice and martyrdom the little way:

¹ Last words of St Thomas More, 6th July 1535.

² 2 Mach. VI, 18-28.

“You make me think of a little child that is learning to stand but does not yet know how to walk. In his desire to reach the top of the stairs to find his mother, he lifts his little foot to climb the first step. It is all in vain, and at each renewed effort he falls. Well, be like that little child. Always keep lifting your foot to climb the ladder of holiness, and do not imagine that you can mount even the first step. All God asks of you is good will. From the top of the ladder He looks lovingly upon you, and soon, touched by your fruitless efforts, He will Himself come down, and, taking you in His Arms, will carry you to His Kingdom never again to leave Him. But should you cease to raise your foot, you will be left for long on the earth.”³

This is where Christ is expecting us today: a sacrifice of our own will for the love and perfect accomplishment of His divine Will. In that way, our life will not be different of the two extraordinary models we are offered to contemplate this morning. This sacrifice is for today, and to be renewed every day of our life till the end. Let's not put aside, or for tomorrow, this offering and sacrifice Jesus is asking today.

The martyrdom of duty is probably more demanding than the sacrifice of life, as we remain alive, without being able to immediately enjoy the eternal reward. But it is the way of holiness God assigned us. As He chose it for us, it is the right way. We will find our salvation through obedience, not to our own choices and will, but to God's. Then following the last words of St Thomas More, we will remain “the King's good servant, and God's first.”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

³ St Therese of the Child Jesus, Counsels and Reminiscences.