

Thomas More 6 July

Lawyer, 1535 — Commemoration

Thomas More was an English lawyer and statesman who was beheaded in 1535 because he chose loyalty to the Pope over submission to his King. As he said to his daughter when she visited him in prison: "God's grace hath strengthened me hitherto and made me content in my heart to lose goods, land, and life too, rather than to swear against my conscience."

For almost twenty years More had enjoyed brilliant success in law and politics. He entered the House of Commons and made a name for himself as a critic of royal policies. Nevertheless he became Speaker of the House and even gained the warm respect of King Henry VIII. At the same time, More gained international fame as a model of the true Renaissance Catholic. He was hailed for the learning and wit he displayed in his writing and conversation; and it was well known that he observed a constant round of intense prayer and strict fasting in his private life. His reputation for political integrity and devout wisdom was rewarded in 1529, when the King appointed him Lord Chancellor of England.

Soon afterwards Henry VIII began to insist on the independence of the Church of England. More sided with those who defended the claims of the Pope and resigned as Lord Chancellor. He retired into private life, but his international fame was so great that the King demanded his public support. When More refused to swear an oath which violated his convictions, the King had him tried on a charge of high treason and sentenced to death. As he stood on the scaffold, More said: "I die the King's good servant, but God's first."

See Readings, page 595.

Sentence

Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and God the things that are God's. *Mark 12.17*

Collect

Almighty God,
who strengthened Thomas More
to be in office a king's good servant
but in conscience your servant first,
grant us in all our doubts and uncertainties
to feel the grasp of your holy hand
and to live by faith in your promise
that you shall not let us be lost;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Readings

1 Peter 3.13-16 Psalm 119.161-168

Refrain I have hoped for your salvation, O God.

Mark 12.13-17

Prayer over the Gifts

Merciful God,
remember your servant Thomas More
and look with compassion on our hopes and desires,
that we may be cleansed from all worldly ambitions
and made worthy for the service of your table.
We ask this in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Preface of a Saint

Prayer after Communion

O God, the Healer of our humanity,
who accepted the witness of your servant Thomas More
for the sovereign rights of conscience,
grant us the testimony of an undivided heart,
that we may go forth into the world
to keep your righteous commandments.
This we ask through Jesus Christ the Lord.