

Monday June 22nd, Feast of Saints John Fisher and Thomas More

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the advice from the government and the medics about what we should be doing in this time of crisis.

And I trust everyone continues to pray for all our needs at this time.

Today we celebrate in England the Feast of two of our greatest English Saints, St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More.

John Fisher was born in Yorkshire in 1469. He was educated at Cambridge University where he became a top scholar. He became a priest in 1491 and a bishop in the year 1504. As Bishop of Rochester he was the spiritual director of King Henry VIII's mother. We all know the story that Henry VIII wanted to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon, in order to marry Anne Boleyn. He was angry with John for insisting that his marriage to Queen Catherine was valid, and further angered when John rejected his claim to be the Supreme Head of the Church in England. Henry VIII had John arrested and sent to the Tower of London where John suffered greatly but would not betray his faith. Whilst he was imprisoned in the Tower of London, Pope Paul III named John a cardinal, yet even this did not encourage Henry to set him free, but only made him more angry.

The story of Thomas More parallels that of John Fisher. Thomas was born in London, in 1478. A famous writer and lawyer, Thomas was a married man, and he and his family lived happily, sharing with the poor. He was deeply religious and prayed long hours into the night and performed many penances. Thomas was also a good friend Henry VIII who made him Chancellor of England, really second only to the King himself. Thomas used his role to enforce just laws saw that the poor were protected against injustice. Once while Thomas was hearing Mass, Henry sent for him. Thomas would not leave until the Mass was finished, but sent this message, *'As soon as my audience with the King of Heaven is ended, I will at once obey the desire of my earthly king.'* As with John Fisher, when Thomas refused to consider Henry VIII's law to make him Supreme Head of the Church of England he resigned his position, and was arrested. At the trial false witnesses were called against him, and he was condemned to death.

John was beheaded on June 22, 1535 with Thomas being beheaded on July 6, 1535. The two close friends were proclaimed saints by Pope Pius XI in 1935, and in 2000 Thomas More was proclaimed Patron saint of Politicians by Pope St. John Paul II. Their lives show steadfastness to the faith despite

of adversity, both men striving to model citizens, but always abiding by the consciences. Today they are a reminder that we should do the same, and if we see laws and governmental advice that we feel to be wrong or against the teaching of God and his Church we should speak up about it, writing to our politicians, seeking laws that proclaim justice and truth and wellbeing of all, especially those most at need in society.

*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 last meet merrily with them
and be partakers for ever in the inheritance of your saints in light.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, you Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever. Amen.*

The above prayer is the Collect, the Opening Prayer for today's Feast, but I always used to love the closing prayer for this Feast in the old translation of the Mass:

*Lord,
renew us with this food from heaven
and strengthen us by the example of your martyrs John Fisher and Thomas More,
so that we may always follow conscience
and be the king's good servant, but God's first.
Though Christ our Lord. Amen.*

I love the phrase 'the king's good servant, but God's first.' It really sums up today's Feast, and is as true today as it was five hundred years ago.

So for our hymn today let us remember all the valiant English Martyrs as we sing 'Faith Of Our Fathers' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfxDyNZazOY> It's not the best of versions, but one of the few I could find that use the bouncy tune that we sing, rather than singing it to the tune of 'O Bread of Heaven.'

As I'm sure you know, the history of Thomas More was told in Robert Bolt's play 'A Man For All Seasons,' which became an Oscar winning film, and is well worth a watch if you can find it on DVD or any of the streaming channel thingumabobs. And if you want to know more about Henry VIII and his six wives, check out the musical 'Six' in which Henry's wives come back as a girl band to tell

their true story – it's an absolute riot, with witty, intelligent lyrics. Seriously. If you catch me walking on the Prom today (weather permitting) I'll be listening to it on my iPod!

Well, it was so lovely to have Church open yesterday afternoon, and over fifty people dropped in to say a prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Huge thanks to the Stewards for ensuring everyone hand sanitized and kept social distance, and wipe down the benches afterwards. We'll slightly alter the arrangements next week, so that the sanitizers are in the porch, to help keep the noise down. Unfortunately we do have to keep the doors open to ensure air flow, so we can't block out the traffic noise. It's all a step in the right direction.

Many thanks for the positive comments about the pictures of the Mass from my point of view – several people have said they intend to print them out and frame them, and we might be able to do something about this after lockdown. I attach another pic, an 'outtake' from the set. It's quite lovely in that reflected in the precious blood is the cross of light from the ceiling of the sanctuary, making quite a powerful image.

I hope you all have a lovely week, and as lockdown restrictions are slowly being lifted, let's pray that the 'new normality' will soon enable us to come together to celebrate Mass.

Mass for the Twelfth Sunday of the Year is available on the YouTube at

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PN0e_G6n4AE&feature=youtu.be

The two hymns are 'All People That On Earth Do Dwell' and four verses of 'Immaculate Mary.'

The official link for the Mass Sheet is

https://www.rpbooks.co.uk/uploads/www.rpbooks.co.uk/14_12inOrdinaryTimeA.pdf

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed, though the building is, though hopefully not for long. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.

