

Reflection Tuesday Week 12 St John Fisher & St Thomas More 2021

St John Fisher (1469 - 1535) was born in Beverley, Yorkshire, in 1469. He studied theology in Cambridge and eventually became chancellor of the University and bishop of Rochester: unusually for the time, he paid great attention to the welfare of his diocese.

He wrote against the errors and corruption in the Church at that time, and was a friend and supporter of humanists like Erasmus of Rotterdam but greatly opposed to Lutheranism.

He supported the validity of King Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon, for which he was briefly imprisoned. When the King had divorced Catherine, married Anne Boleyn, and constituted himself supreme Head of the Church in England, John Fisher refused to assent. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London charged with treason, and on 22nd June 1535, a month after being made a Cardinal by the Pope, he was executed. He was so ill and weak that he had to be carried in a chair to the place of execution.

He was the only bishop to oppose Henry VIII's actions, believing them to be a repudiation of papal authority, but avoided direct confrontation with other bishops, not holding himself up as a hero or boasting of his coming martyrdom: *I condemn no other man's conscience: their conscience may save them, and mine must save me.* In all the controversies, treat opponents as if they were acting in good faith, even if they seem to be acting out of spite or self-interest.

St Thomas More (1477 - 1535) was born in London, the son of a judge, he became an eminent lawyer. He married twice and had four children. He was a humanist and a reformer, and his book, *Utopia*, depicting a society regulated by the natural virtues, is still read today. Thomas More was a close friend of Henry VIII. As a judge, he was famous for his incorruptibility and impartiality, and was made Lord Chancellor – the highest legal position in England – in 1529.

When Henry VIII demanded a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, Thomas More opposed him. He resigned the chancellorship in 1532 and retired from public life but was unable to retire from his reputation and was obliged to take an oath to support the Act of Succession, which effectively repudiated papal religious authority. He refused, and was imprisoned in the Tower. After the execution of John Fisher, he was charged with high treason for denying the King's supreme headship of the Church, found guilty, and sentenced to death. He went to his execution, on 6th July 1535, with a clear conscience and a light heart. He said he was still *"the king's good servant – but God's first,"* carefully adjusting his beard before being beheaded. He wrote a number of devotional works, some while in prison awaiting trial. He fought his fight without acrimony, telling his judges that he wished that *"we may yet hereafter in Heaven merrily all meet together to everlasting salvation."*

What's the difference between the bird flu and the swine flu? One requires **tweetment** and the other an **oinkment**.

Why do seagulls fly over the sea? Because if they flew over a bay, they would be bagels.

What do you call birds that stick together? Vel-crows