

Reflection Wednesday Week 12 St John Fisher & St Thomas More 2022

St John Fisher was born in Beverley, Yorkshire, in 1469. He studied theology at Cambridge, and 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 of the Church and was a friend of great humanists such as Erasmus of Rotterdam; but he was greatly opposed to Lutheranism, both in its doctrine and in its ideas of reform. He supported the validity of King Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon. When Henry divorced Catherine, married Anne Boleyn, and constituted himself the 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 they had to carry him in a chair to the place of execution. He famously said: *I condemn no other man's conscience: their conscience may save them, and mine must save me.*

St Thomas More was born in London in 1474 the son of a judge. He became an eminent lawyer. Married twice he 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 King Henry VIII. As a judge, he was famous for his incorruptibility and impartiality, and he 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. He was ordered to take an oath to support the Act of Succession, which effectively repudiated papal religious authority. He refused and was imprisoned in the Tower of London. After the execution of John Fisher, he was accused of 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 told the spectators that he was still "the king's good servant – but God's first," and carefully adjusted his beard before being beheaded. He wrote a number of devotional works. He fought his case without acrimony, telling his judges that "*we may yet hereafter in Heaven merrily all meet together to everlasting salvation.*"

Adapted from St Thomas More, 1535

Almighty God, have mercy on all who bear us ill will and harm us. We ask you to amend and redress both their faults and ours through your tender merciful means. In your wisdom save our souls so that we may be in Heaven together. There may we ever live and love together with you and all the saints. Lord, give us patience in tribulation and grace in everything, to conform our wills to yours so that we may truly say: "*May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*". Good Lord, give us the grace to work for the things for which we pray. Amen.