

WITNESSES TO FREEDOM

STs. THOMAS MORE AND JOHN FISHER



(Our Lady of Victories, Kensington, London;
Photo by Fr. Lawrence Lew, OP)

*"I die the king's good servant,
but God's first."*

Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher were Renaissance men. Talented and energetic, they contributed to the humanist scholarship of early modern England. More wrote theological and philosophical treatises, while making a career as a lawyer and government official. Bishop John Fisher worked as an administrator at Cambridge, confronted the challenge Martin Luther presented to Christian Europe, and most importantly served as Bishop of Rochester. As a bishop, he is notable for his dedication to preaching at a time when bishops tended to focus on politics. These men were brilliant. They both corresponded with Erasmus, who helped Bishop Fisher learn Greek and Hebrew, and who also famously referred to More as a man *omnium horarium*, a man of all seasons.

Above all their accomplishments, these men bore witness to a deep faith in Christ and his Church. More considered joining religious life and was assiduous in his devotional practices. As a married man, he committed himself wholly to his vocation as a father. At the time, disciplinary practices with children tended to be severe, but More's children testify to his warmth, patience, and generosity.

St. John Fisher was a model shepherd and demonstrated remarkable humility. He remained in the small Diocese

of Rochester his entire episcopal ministry, devoting himself to his local church rather than seeking promotion to a larger, more powerful diocese.

More and Fisher are well-known for opposing King Henry's divorce. Ultimately, it was their refusal to sign an oath of supremacy that led them to be executed. King Henry VIII claimed to be the supreme head of the Church in England, asserting sovereign power over English Christians. Neither Fisher nor More could abide this claim, and their steadfastness to their consciences put them in conflict with the king. They were convicted of treason.

When More made his way to the gallows, he is said to have stated, "I die the King's good servant, but God's first." Both More and Fisher were patriots. They never rose up to incite rebellion or foment revolution. They were no traitors. But when the law of the king came into conflict with the law of Christ, they chose Christ. These men gave their lives for the freedom of the Church and for freedom of conscience. They bear witness to the truth that no government can make a claim on a person's soul.

**Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher,
pray that we too will be good servants to our country,
but God's first!**



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