

Ss. Thomas Moore and John Fisher (2018)

(2 Kgs 11:1-4,9-18,20; Matt 6:19-23)

Penance:

In today=s gospel Our Lord warns us about the dangers and impermanence of worldly possessions, both of which we see illustrated in the world around us. As monks we should be insulated from such dangers--but only if we take the spirit of poverty seriously. For the times and ways we fail in this, let us ask forgiveness.

Have mercy on us, O Lord, ...

Today we celebrate Ss. Thomas More and John Fisher, martyrs under Henry VIII who was attempting to make himself head of the Church in England.

Ss. Thomas and John had their contrasts and similarities. One was a layman, married, a father, a family man, a lawyer, the Lord High Chancellor of the realm; the other was a cleric and theologian who became bishop of Rochester and Chancellor of Cambridge University.

Thomas More continued in lay life the zeal that had led to his attempt to be a Carthusian, while the holiness of John Fisher was revealed in his pastoral care and concern for his diocese.

When it came to the Act of Supremacy, both avoided denying that Henry was Supreme Head of the Church of England. Thomas More, in fact, made his defense on the assertion that to be silent was not a crime but a right--which did not save him from being condemned. His suffering was greatly increased by the sight of the suffering of his wife

and family, both by his incarceration and being reduced to poverty. John Fisher's opinion that Henry was not head of the Church was extorted from him with the claim that the king wanted his judgment so as to form his own conscience, with a traitorous promise that it would not be used against him. Both were martyred in 1535.

Thomas More is may be better known in some circles for his authorship of "Utopia" than for his holiness and martyrdom. "Utopia," of course, was a socio-political satire, depicting an imaginary society, ideal, in which the abuses then current didn't exist. One reviewer suggests it propelled England from an oppressive monarchy to a free democracy. It puts one in mind of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," subtitle, "For preventing the the children of poor people from being a burden ... and making them beneficial to the public." It mocked the heartless attitudes toward the poor and the British attitude toward the Irish in general. The impoverished Irish could ease their poverty by selling thei infant children as food for the rich. It used husbandry terms, such as reserving 1/10 for breeding stock, dams instead of mothers, suggest ways they could be deliciously prepared. The point, of course, was to shock people into recognizing their xenophobia and how far they had departed from more traditional human values. I think we need a Thomas Moore and a Jonathan Swift to shock us in the same way.

Returning to martyrdom, for which we celebrate these two, we remind ourselves that, even for monks, the future is not cut and dried. None of us knows precisely

what lays ahead. We always proceed in faith, knowing that God is faithful, hoping that what St. Benedict promises, quoting St. Paul, **A** what eye has not seen and ear has not heard, **@** awaits us.

That the poor may be treated with respect, compassion, and generosity, we
that our immigrants may be welcomed, provided for, and
the children united with parents,
For employment for those who seek it
for new vocations
for what else