



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP



“Where are the Others?”

Bishop John Barres’ Statement on the 20th Anniversary of the Proclamation of St. Thomas More as the Patron of Statesmen and Politicians

In 1929, G.K. Chesterton wrote the following words about the impact of Thomas More (1478-1535) on history: “Blessed Thomas More is more important at this moment than at any moment since his death, even perhaps the great moment of his dying but he is not quite so important as he will be in about a hundred years’ time.”¹

On October 31, 2020, nine years in advance of the 100 years that Chesterton prophetically spoke about, we celebrate the 20th Anniversary of Pope St. John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter (*Motu Proprio*) proclaiming St. Thomas More to be the patron of statesmen and politicians.² In his courageous witness to truth and his martyrdom, St. Thomas More is “a Man for all Seasons” and a Man for all Centuries.

In that October 31, 2000 Apostolic Letter, Pope St. John Paul II wrote: “There are many reasons for proclaiming Thomas More Patron of statesmen and people in public life. Among these is the need felt by the world of politics and public administration for credible role models able to indicate the path of truth at a time in history when difficult challenges and crucial responsibilities are increasing. Today in fact strongly innovative economic forces are reshaping social structures; on the

¹ As quoted in Gerard B. Wegemer, *Thomas More: A Portrait of Courage*, (Princeton, Scepter Publishers, 1995), 227.

² See also 1) *St. Thomas More: Patron of Statesmen, Politicians and Lawyers. The October 31, 2010 Joint Statement of the Pennsylvania Catholic Bishops on the Tenth Anniversary of the Apostolic Letter (Motu Proprio) of Pope John Paul II Proclaiming St. Thomas More as the Patron of Statesmen, Politicians and Lawyers.* 2) Most Rev. Michael A. Saltarelli’s September 20, 2004 *Litany of St. Thomas More, Martyr and Patron Saint of Statesmen, Politicians and Lawyers* (Diocese of Wilmington).

other hand, scientific achievements in the area of biotechnology underline the need to defend human life at all its different stages, while the promises of a new society – successfully presented to a bewildered public opinion – urgently demand clear political decisions in favor of the family, young people, the elderly and the marginalized. In this context, it is helpful to turn to the example of St. Thomas More, who distinguished himself by his constant fidelity to legitimate authority and institutions precisely in his intention to serve not power but the supreme ideal of justice. His life teaches us that government is above all an exercise of virtue.”³

At this critical moment of American history for our Statesmen, Politicians, Presidential Candidates, Supreme Court Justices (and potential Supreme Court Justices), Judges and Lawyers, we turn to St. Thomas More to intercede so that they may be courageous and effective in their defense and promotion of the sanctity of human life – the foundation of all other human rights.

On September 8, 2020, the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I issued a Pastoral Letter *Evangelium Vitae: The Gospel of Life for Today* which celebrated the 25th Anniversary of Pope St. John Paul II’s great encyclical and reflected on his Gospel of Life teaching in these Covid-19 crisis times. I encourage you all to read, pray and study it (see www.drvc.org).

There is a powerful relationship between our witness to the Gospel of Human Life and our belief in Eternal Life.

The French writer Charles Peguy (1873-1914) was once asked what the Lord Jesus would ask each one of us at the moment of our death and individual judgment.

Peguy, echoing our Lord’s parable of Lazarus and the rich man in the Gospel of St. Luke, responded that Our Lord’s merciful and compassionate eyes would gaze into ours and He would ask: “**Where are the others? Where are the others?**” In other words, Our Lord will ask us what have we done for our brothers and sisters, and in particular what have we done for the poorest and least of them? Did we aid them in their suffering and hunger or did we ignore them as we dressed in fine clothes and lived in luxury? (See Luke 16:19-31)

And the question goes further than that. Within the question – **Where are the others?** – are the questions: **Where are the unborn? Where are the elderly?**

³ See also *Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to the United Kingdom* (September 16-19, 2020, Meeting with the Representatives of British Society, including the Diplomatic Corps, Politicians, Academics and Business Leaders), Westminster Hall – City of Westminster, September 17, 2010.

Where are those that our society increasingly looks upon as disposable with no rights and no recognition of their humanity?

In his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis writes: “Some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence. Ultimately, ‘persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, ‘not yet useful’ – like the unborn, or ‘no longer needed’ – like the elderly.” (18)

Part of our response to the Lord will be an account of what we did in the course of our lives to defend and promote the life of the unborn and the elderly in the public square⁴ – especially in New York State where the so-called “Reproductive Health Act” not only permits abortion till the moment of birth but goes beyond that to permit forms of infanticide. How is that possibly the law in the richest society in the history of the world, a society that claims to care about the most powerless and marginalized people yet routinely pretends that the most powerless of all do not even exist?

Every Public Servant, Statesman, Politician, Legislator, Judge and Lawyer, and every single one of us will be asked the same question: **Where are the others?** And our responsibility will be truly great.

Please join me, on this the 20th Anniversary of Pope St. John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter (*Motu Proprio*) proclaiming St. Thomas More the Patron of Statesmen and Politicians, to pray for our Statesmen, Politicians, Presidential Candidates, Supreme Court Judges, Judges and Lawyers that they – and all of us through our solemn responsibility of active and faithful citizenship in the public square -- may be courageous for the common good and defend and promote the sanctity of human life, the foundation of all human rights, from conception until natural death.

In a special way, we also ask St. Thomas More’s intercession for the conversion of Catholic public servants who publicly take anti-life positions -- that they may see the full horizon of their lives and anticipate in prayer Our Lord’s compassionate question that blazes with His Divine Mercy: **Where are the others?**

⁴ See USCCB’s *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States with New Introductory Letter*, 2019.