

Rev. Eric R. Fasano, JCL

Homily – Feast of Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher – 6/22/2021

Rdgs: Gen. 13:2, 5-18; Mt 7:6, 12-14.

Pope Benedict XVI offered the keynote speech at Westminster Hall in central London to Members of the British Parliament, religious leaders and senior members of British society on September 17, 2010. The Holy Father warned that religion (Christianity in particular) was "being marginalized" around the world in a way that threatened the stability of civilization itself. Benedict was speaking on the very spot where Saint Thomas More and Saint John Fisher (whose Feasts we celebrate today) were condemned to death nearly 500 years before.

One was a Catholic Bishop, a lover of the poor, and a theologian who became the Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, John Fisher. The other, Thomas More, was a layman, a husband and father of five, a lawyer, judge, scholar, writer and statesman who became the Lord Chancellor of England. Both men were executed by King Henry VIII for their heroic witness to the truth that a just society can only endure if it's laws are built upon an enduring moral foundation.

Pope Benedict challenged his listeners, and in fact the whole world, with these words: "If the moral principles underpinning the democratic process are themselves determined by nothing more solid than social consensus, then the fragility of the process becomes all too evident...." In other words: how do we hold together a society, simply on the basis of what is popular at any given moment? How are serious ethical questions resolved in a just society? Is it through nothing more than "majority rule"?

Fisher and More died, because they would not simply go along with the crowd. They would not bend to the demands of a government willing to force its citizens to violate their consciences. They were willing to risk everything (prestige, social status, careers, and even their lives) rather than give in to the pressure to abandon the moral foundation that informed their consciences.

These two martyrs of conscience are as important in 21st Century America as they were in 16th Century England. Are we growing more deeply into a just and reasonable society? Or, has the use of reason been replaced by ideology that seeks to bully, silence and destroy opponents? Are we a nation that is deepening our profound respect for the sanctity of human life, the integrity of the family, and the right to religious liberty? Or, are we seeing social and governmental pressures, driving people of faith and the free exercise of that faith out of the public square, oddly enough, in the name of tolerance?

"Enter through the narrow gate," Jesus says to us in the Gospel. "Enter through the narrow gate that leads to life (which is life eternal)." Our Lord does not give us this instruction because God wants our path to Heaven to be difficult. Rather, he knows that in a world so often driven by greed, fear, and self-interest, the path of integrity, mercy and charity is going to be naturally hard. Of course it is easier to cut corners and always look out for my own interests first. Of course it is easier to "go along to get along" than it is to stand up for the truths of our Faith, which we believe are the truths that set all people free. "The gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction."

Christ offers us the beginning of an alternative path. We call it the "Golden Rule". "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you." But eventually, Jesus would challenge us to go much further. At the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus would tell his disciples: "Love one another **as I have loved you.**" How did Christ love us? He showed the full measure of his love

by his willingness to lay down his life for us on the cross. Every one of us as baptized Catholic's, are called to take up our cross and follow him.

Brothers and sisters, the fight for a just society built on a moral foundation is a fight that never ends until we see it, please God, in the Communion of Saints in Heaven. Saint Thomas More and Saint John Fisher remind us of the natural allies that the laity and the clergy must be in this fight. Both must be willing to place the love of God and the truths of our Faith ahead of all other worldly concerns, especially ahead of earthly gains and status.

The world needs truly courageous and truly Catholic lawyers, doctors, teachers, artists and priests, not for the glorification of the Church, but because our Faith sends people into the public square who build a just society based on God's law. That moral foundation serves the common good for all people.

These two saints remind us, clergy and laity alike, of the need to take up our crosses and follow him who leads us through the narrow gate. That means preaching, teaching, witnessing to and living the Faith in every aspect of our professional and personal lives. It means becoming saints. The God who calls us will also give us the grace to accomplish this. In every age, the saints remind us that it can be done. Saint John Fisher and Saint Thomas More, pray for us.