

St. Thomas More



"But it's easy. You just say what he wants you to say." Margaret, a young woman in her twenties, pleaded with her resolute father, Thomas More.

Margaret, my dear, it's not easy," he replied."

Thomas More had been a writer and a lawyer. He'd been a member of parliament and a judge (and was famous for being a very fair judge). King Henry VIII had chosen him as one of his advisers, and had then made him lord

chancellor. Thomas was not only popular; he had become very powerful. But within a few years, he'd resigned as lord chancellor and there was every chance he would be sent to prison or even executed - just because he would not say a few words to please the king. So how did this all come about?

King Henry very much wanted to have a son who would be king when he died. He had a daughter named Mary but no sons, and now the doctors said his wife, Queen Catherine, could not have any more children. So Henry claimed he had never been properly married to her and divorced her.

Henry then married another woman named Anne Boleyn. The pope, who (in those days) was the head of the church of England, said this was wrong. So too did Thomas More. It was then he resigned as lord chancellor because he believed the the king was doing wrong. He also refused to go to see Anne crowned queen. All this made Henry very angry, but Thomas was still popular with the ordinary people.

Two years later, the pope still said Anne Boleyn was not truly Henry's wife so Henry persuaded parliament to make a law saying that, in England, he himself and not the pope was head of the church, and that Anne was his legal wife and that her children (and not Mary's) should rule after him. What was more, Henry wanted all the important people in the country to swear by the Holy Bible that all this was true and right.

So, of course, Thomas was asked to swear this holy oath. When he said he wouldn't, the king became angrier still.

What's more, he didn't want someone as popular as Thomas standing up against him - so he wanted Thomas "out of the way." Which was why Margaret was now trying to persuade her father to say the oath.

"It's easy," she said to her father. "It's just a few words. Say anything if it'll save you."

"But it's very wrong to say what's not true it true," her father insisted.

Nothing she could say would persuade him to take the oath. Some time later, he was locked up in a cold, dark, damp cell in the Tower of London. Friends came to see him. They too tired to get him to change his mind: "If you swear the oath, you can go free."

A year after being put in prison, Thomas was charged with being a traitor to the king and the country - what's known as "treason." The punishment for treason was execution. He still refused to take the oath. He was taken to court and found guilty. Later he was beheaded. His head was stuck on a post on London Bridge.

He could have save himself. He didn't. It was a matter of conscience and Thomas More kept true to his conscience.

Reflection

Four hundred years later in 1935, Thomas More was canonized a saint of God. Few saints are more relevant to our time. In the year 2000, in fact, Pope John Paul II named him patron of political leaders. The supreme diplomat and counselor, he did not compromise his own moral values in order to please the king, knowing that true allegiance to authority is not blind acceptance of everything that authority wants.

King Henry himself realized this and tried desperately to win his chancellor to his side because he knew More was a man whose approval counted, a man whose personal integrity no one questioned. But when Thomas More resigned as chancellor, unable to approve the two matters that meant most to Henry, the king had to get rid of him.

A Martyr's Prayer by: Thomas More

Good Lord, give me the grace to spend my life, that when the day of my death shall come, though I feel pain my body, I may feel comfort in my soul; and with due love toward thee, and charity towards the world, I may, through grace, depart into thy glory. Amen.

St. Thomas More, pray for us!



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