

Thomas More was a man of great saintliness of character and integrity, executed by Henry VIII in 1535 for his refusal to endorse Henry's Act of Supremacy. He was born in London in 1478, and was fortunate enough to come into the care of John Morton, archbishop of Canterbury, for his education. He debated for some time whether to become a friar or a priest, but in the end opted for a career in law and for marriage. In 1505 he married Jane Colt. When she died in 1511, he married Alice Middleton, a widow. Throughout his life he maintained a strict religious discipline with strong ascetic tendencies. Family life was cultured and religious and included the education of his daughter Margaret to a level not common for women at that time.

Thomas soon became well known for his intellectual brilliance, his wit, and his obvious moral integrity. He had much sympathy with the New Learning then sweeping Europe, and Erasmus, the best known promoter of this intellectual humanism, influenced him deeply. More's best known contribution to this field was *Utopia* (1516), a treatise depicting an ideal island state. More used the treatise as a vehicle for some sharp criticisms of contemporary conditions in church and state. More remained, however, a loyal and faithful member of the Catholic Church. That was to lead to his death because of the changes in England under Henry VIII.

Henry VIII recognised More's ability very early in his reign and promoted him to various offices. More entered parliament in 1504 and was a well known public figure, holding several important offices. In general theology More ably backed Henry's Catholic stand against Luther, which earned Henry the title, "Defender of the Faith". In 1529 Henry made Thomas More lord chancellor in succession to Cardinal Wolsey. In that position More carried through some of Henry's reforms of the clergy. Then Henry sought an annulment by the pope of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. He was clearly prepared to cut the church in England off from Rome and assume headship of the church himself, in order to fulfil his plans for a legitimate heir by another marriage. More declined to agree with the king in this matter.

More resigned his chancellorship, and would have been content to live in obscurity, but Henry turned against his friend, and refused to let so public a figure defy him. More was imprisoned in the Tower for his refusal to assent to Henry's Act of Succession in 1534, which established his marriage to Anne Boleyn as lawful and any offspring as legitimate heirs to the throne. Attempts were made to persuade Thomas to agree, but without success. It was his refusal to accept the Act of Supremacy in 1535, which declared the king to be "only supreme head of the Church in England", that led to More's execution for treason on 6 July 1535.

For Liturgical Use

Thomas More was born in 1478. He was renowned for his charm, wit and integrity, and for his strict spiritual discipline. As lord chancellor of England, he supported Henry VIII's moves to reform the clergy. However, loyal to his Catholic heritage, he consistently opposed Henry's plans for divorce and re-marriage to secure a legitimate heir. More refused to accept the Act of Supremacy in 1535 that declared the king "only supreme head of the Church in England", and was executed for treason on 6 July that year.

Sentence

Your steadfast love, O Lord, is better than life itself; therefore my lips will speak your praise.

Collects

God of faithfulness and integrity,
you strengthened your servant Thomas More
by your gifts of love and loyalty;
grant us also in our dealings
to be honest and faithful
and in all things to be true to your commands;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Jesus, you will not fail us
nor forsake us;
you were with Thomas More
through his imprisonment and at his execution.
Help us, if we feel called to stand on principle
against the Power,
to put our confidence in you,
and give you the glory.

Psalms 15 146

Readings

Wisdom 2:12-15, 19-22	Plotting against the upright
1 Corinthians 2:1-10	Spiritual strength
Matthew 24:9-13	Jesus' promise to the faithful

Post Communion Sentence

This is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you
have sent. *John 17:3*