

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

June 27, 2021

Wisdom 1:13–15; 2:23–24 • 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13–15 • Mark 5:21–32

I.

This past week,
the Church commemorated two saints who died as martyrs
at the beginning of the English Reformation, in 1535:
Thomas More and John Fisher.

St. Thomas More (1478–1535), a layman,
was a friend of King Henry VIII and the chancellor of England.

St. John Fisher (1469–1535) was the bishop of Rochester.

For their opposition to the king's claim that he was the head of the Church,
which would allow him to divorce the queen and marry someone else,
both John Fisher and Thomas More were beheaded for treason.

People have come to know about St. Thomas More
from the play and film that chronicle the end of his life:
A Man For All Seasons (1960, 1966).

St. John Fisher is more obscure.

In his day, he was renowned for his scholarship and personal holiness.

After Fisher had been imprisoned in the Tower of London for more than a year,
without access to a chaplain,
Pope Paul III made him a cardinal in an attempt to save his life.

That decision only enraged the king, who purportedly said,
“The pope can send the [red] hat,
but there will be no head to put it on.”

Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher made the supreme act of faith:
they sacrificed their lives in witness to Jesus Christ.

Their martyrdom had implications for English-speaking Catholics.

With the exception of the brief reign of Queen Mary I (1553–1558), England became Protestant and Catholicism there was outlawed.

Seventy-four years later, England officially prohibited Catholicism in Jamestown (1609), its first permanent colony in America.

During the colonial period (1607–1783), and the first years of American independence (1783–1786), it was illegal to be a Catholic in Virginia.

In practice, penal laws against Catholics and others were enforced unevenly.

Still, only the Statute of Religious Liberty, written by Thomas Jefferson and adopted by Virginia in 1786, allowed Catholics, and others in the commonwealth who did not belong to the Church of England, to openly practice their faith.

II.

“Faith” is an expansive term that can become vague.

Sometimes we think of faith as an intuition or feeling; at other times, we think of it as trust in God.

Those elements are aspects of faith, but there’s more to it.

The First Vatican Council, held in 1871, defined faith as, “the full homage of the intellect and will to God who reveals” (*Dei Filius*, ch. 3; Denzinger 3008).

“Intellect” and “will” designate all that we think and do—in other words, our whole lives, which receive, apply, and bear witness to all that God does and teaches.

The Church explains that faith is both a gift from God and a free human response to that gift (*Dei Filius*, ch. 3; Denzinger 3008, 3010).

Today's Gospel, and the lives of Sts. John Fisher and Thomas More, provide vivid illustrations of faith.

The woman suffering from hemorrhages,
and Jairus, a synagogue official,
both believe in Jesus' healing power.

They also act—and act courageously—on that belief.

The woman must force her way through the crowd;
Jairus has to endure the ridicule of another crowd,
which mocks Jesus' claim that his daughter isn't really dead.

In both cases, the person's boldness and willingness to approach Christ is rewarded.

By contrast, the first crowd may be more interested in a spectacle;
perhaps they want to see some razzle-dazzle from Jesus.

The second crowd, gathered at Jairus' house,
completely dismisses Jesus.

In the United States,
Catholics are often pressured by the “crowd” of culture
to consider our religion a purely private matter,
which we should not bring into the public square
because of the separation of Church and state.

But that is a misunderstanding and warping of faith.

After all,
the First Amendment to our Constitution protects the “free exercise” of religion.

Religion is not just going to Mass on Sunday;
it's acting in accordance with our faith in all aspects of life:
at home, at work, and in civic affairs.

This is your specific mission as members of the lay faithful,
as the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) explained:

“The laity, by their very vocation,
 seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs
 and by ordering them according to the plan of God.
 They live in the world... in each and in all of the secular professions...
 They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life...
 They are called there by God that...
 they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.
 In this way they may make Christ known to others”
 (*Lumen gentium*, no. 31).

The “secular professions” mentioned include business, science, law, art,
 entertainment, and politics.

Vatican II explained further that,

“In every temporal affair [the laity] must be guided by a Christian conscience,
 since even in secular business there is no human activity
 which can be withdrawn from God’s dominion. ...
 The temporal sphere is governed by its own principles,
 since it is rightly concerned with the interests of this world.
 But that ominous doctrine which attempts to build a society
 with no regard whatever for religion,
 and which attacks and destroys the religious liberty of its citizens,
 is rightly to be rejected” (no. 36; see *Gaudium et spes*, no. 43).

Ordering temporal affairs to God’s plan does not mean proselytizing
 or imposing our beliefs on others.

This is because Christian faith seeks to uphold human dignity
 and to promote authentic human development—the common good.

These principles of human dignity and the common good
 are not only compatible with our country’s founding principles,
 but also advance them:
 “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Concretely, having faith means responding to the needs of the world
 by addressing the major issues of our time:

- Protecting the unborn.

- Eradicating racism.
- Safeguarding marriage, the family, and the truth about human sexuality.
- Protecting and caring for the poor.

IV.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that,

“Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed” (no. 150).

Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher gave the ultimate witness to their faith, and they inspire us to bear witness with our own lives.

Thomas More reportedly said on the scaffold, as his final words:

“I die the king’s good servant, but God’s first.”

It’s as if he had just heard Christ’s words in the Gospel:

“Do not be afraid; just have faith.”