

St. Thomas saw this place of the Cistercian as a place of penance, and submitted to the rules of the house, without exception. Here he wrote to opponents and supporters in such a manner that it hardened the position of both sides. Meanwhile, Henry confiscated the properties of Thomas, banished his friends and hardened in his schism. He even threatened the Cistercians with confiscation of their properties in England if they continued to harbor Thomas and his friends. Thomas agreed to leave, and took up residence with King Louis at the monastery of St. Columba while negotiations went on for six years. In July, 1170 a truce was worked out. On December 1, he returned to Sandwich to much acclaim and peace. When the archbishop of York assisted in the coronation of Henry's son, in defiance of both Thomas and the Pope, Thomas had the archbishop and three other bishops deposed. When Thomas was in London, the "boy King" refused to meet with him. Later, at Bayeux when the bishops were arguing their case, the "boy King" uttered those fateful words that he did not want Thomas to be the Archbishop any longer. Four knights Reginald Fitzurse, William de Tracy, Hugh de Morville, and Richard le Breton took this remark as a wish for the Archbishop to die,

On St. John's day (December 29, 1170), Thomas received a letter warning of the threat. The four knights initially came to him demanding a release of the censures against the bishops, but he refused and they left in anger. They soon returned and Thomas was ushered off by attendants to the Church, where the doors were shut, and then re-opened by Thomas when the monks were shut out. Finally, only Edward Grim, was left with Thomas. The knights approached asking where was the traitor, Thomas responded that only an archbishop and a priest of God were present. Both men stood between the altars of St. Benedict and of our Lady. The knights demanded the release of censure once again, but Thomas refused. Edward Grim blocked the first blow, but it still lacerated the head of Thomas. A struggle ensued, and St. Thomas called upon the Lord and His saints. He went to his knees and uttered that for Christ and His Church he was willing to die. After receiving repeated blows to the head, Thomas passed away. Only the knight Hugh de Morville did not strike any blows against Thomas. Once the knights finished, they fled The cloister.

Thomas was canonized by Pope Alexander III on Ash Wednesday, 1173. Many doubt the intention of Henry to have Thomas Becket killed, but in July, 1174 eighteen months after Thomas' canonization, Henry submitted to a public scourging as an act of humiliation. On the seventh of July, 1220 St. Thomas' relics were translated from the crypt to a tomb behind the high altar in an enormous gathering. In attendance were Stephen Cardinal Langton, archbishop of Canterbury, King Henry III, and Cardinal Panduff, papal legate and archbishop of Rheims. After the incident, Canterbury became the third greatest site of pilgrimage in all of Europe. Many miracles have been reported to have taken place at the site.

****(excerpted from: www.cin.org)

Reflection

*****No one becomes a saint without struggle, especially with himself. Thomas knew he must stand firm in defense of the truth and right, even at the cost of his life. We also must take a stand in the face of pressures-against dishonesty, deceit, destruction of life-at the cost of popularity, convenience, promotion and even greater goods.

*****(excerpted from:www.americancatholic.org)

Saint Thomas Becket Archbishop of Canterbury Feast Day December 29



*O God,
for the sake of whose Church
the glorious Bishop Thomas
fell by the sword of ungodly men:
grant, we beseech Thee,
that all who implore his aid,
may obtain the good fruit of his petition.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Who livest and reignest with Thee
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever.
Amen.*

St. Thomas Becket

**Thomas Becket was born in Southwark, England on December 21, 1118 A.D., the son of middle-class parents who were descended from the Normans. Educated by the Roman Catholic Church at Merton Abbey, he later studied in Paris. He first served as a clerk for a time in the government of the London police. There he was obliged to learn the various rights of the Church and of the secular arm, but already he saw so many injustices imposed upon the clergy that he preferred to leave that employment rather than participate in iniquity. He then entered the employment of Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury. Thomas soon rose to prominence as both a clerk and an advisor to the Archbishop. Theobald allowed Thomas to study civil and church law for a year at the University of Bologna, Italy. When he returned to England, the Archbishop ordained him as a deacon and made him Archdeacon of Canterbury. So superior were Thomas' intellect and abilities that Theobald recommended him to the new King, Henry II, for the important position of Chancellor of England. The King acted on that recommendation, and Thomas became one of the most powerful men in England at about the age of 37 when he became the Lord Chancellor of England.*

**(excerpted from: www.magnificat.ca)*

***As Chancellor, Becket lived a life of luxury and enjoyed the Kings confidence. They were close friends, and spent a lot of time together – governing, scheming, drinking, and hunting. Some of that scheming involved ways of tapping the wealth of the church for the benefit of the kingdom, which made many enemies for Becket among the English clergy. Becket served his King well in war, as a more than capable military leader, and also carried out diplomatic missions for Henry. Thomas was the Kings right-hand man, and quite probably his best friend.*

When Archbishop Theobald died in 1161, King Henry did all in his power to see that Thomas took over his archdiocese. Thomas was not pleased about the idea but, urged upon by Cardinal Henry of Pisa, was ordained a priest on a Saturday in Whit-week by the bishop of Rochester, and was consecrated as Archbishop the next day, Sunday, June 3, 1162 by Henry of Blois, the bishop of Winchester.

After attaining the See of Canterbury, something changed in him. Becket re-signed as Chancellor – a move which apparently surprised King Henry – and he devoted himself wholeheartedly to God. He established a rule for himself, focused on penance and prayer, gave up all luxuries, selling his possessions and given the money to the poor. He adopted the lifestyle of an ascetic: becoming a vegetarian, sleeping little, praying and fasting often, and wearing an irritating “hair shirt” as a sign of penitence. Every day he met with the poor and did his best to feed them, and every night he humbly washed the feet of 13 beggars while doubling the alms given to the poor. He personally examined all the candidates to the priesthood while reorganizing The Archiepiscopal household into a monastic fashion. Regularly he would visit the monks in their cloister,

and became moderate and tempered as compared to his life before becoming a religious. The relationship between Thomas and Henry remained for the most part the same for the next year.

Beckett zealously began defending the interests of the Church. This quickly brought him into conflict with Henry. His friendship became strained after he resisted various plans that Henry wanted to institute. Small flare-ups escalated into open conflict in October of AD 1163 when St. Thomas called for a synod to inform his fellow bishops of their need to turn criminal clergy over to civil authorities to be prosecuted. Henry interjected himself to require the bishops to follow several royal (unspecified) customs of the crown. The bishops and their primate committed a non-denial denial of this act, slighting the power of the King. By the time the Council of Clarendon in AD 1164, Henry demanded several holdings of Thomas be handed over, required royal permission for leaving England to go abroad or appeal to Rome, required that the revenue of vacant benefices come to the King (a holdover of Henry I), no one could be excommunicated against the will of the King, and required clerics prosecuted in ecclesiastical courts be handed over to civil authority (for possible double punishment).

Thomas acquiesced to some extent in excepting these impositions, and was greatly remorseful in providing a bad example for the other bishops which they were only to willing to follow. In committing what he felt was a sinful act of submission, he would not for over forty days offer the Mass, until receiving absolution. Henry nevertheless continued the attacks on Thomas, culminating in a council at Northampton. Henry had already fined Thomas 30,000 marks, and the lords persuaded their respective prelates with the king to: fine Thomas for not showing up, monetary causes put against Thomas, and then several accounts were demanded. Henry of Winchester tried to stem the tide, but to no avail. Most of the attacks came at Thomas as former chancellor; a cunning act of obfuscation (concealing their real purpose) and in reality cowardice.

On the thirteenth of October, AD 1164, Thomas celebrated a votive Mass for St. Stephen the protomartyr. Afterwards Thomas, without mitre or pallium, entered the hall with his metropolitan cross in hand to meet the king. A baron came out, and informed Thomas he would have to render all his accounts, or suffer judgment. To this, Thomas informed the baron he was not subject to temporal authority, would answer to no charges, and in fact all those in attendance were servants to the Church, the Pope and God, and would have only to appear before the Pope to settle these matters. He was responded to with shouts of “traitor.”

Thomas left Northampton and embarked from Sandwich. He and his companions landed at Flanders where they went to King Louis VII of France. Pope Alexander III was at that time at Sens, and the prelates at the behest of Henry came to Sens and accused Thomas of all matters of offense, then left before Thomas arrived. Thomas showed the Pope the 16 edits of Clarendon, which the Pope condemned en masse. Thomas then informed the Pope of the circumstances of his election, and offered the ring of his office and resignation, feeling his consecration was not canonical. The Pope reinstated Thomas in dignity to his office, and told him to hold fast so as to not be seen as abandoning the cause of God. With this, he went to the abbot of Pontigny to stay.