

# **Meditations: June 22, Saint Thomas More**

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on June 22, feast of Saint Thomas More.

- A good husband and father
- Bringing the light of the Gospel to every sector
- A heroism forged day by day

SAINT THOMAS MORE was born in 1478 and died a martyr in 1535. A prestigious lawyer and statesman, he held various public offices and in 1529 became Lord High Chancellor of England. His legal and political career was combined with intense

study of the humanities, and he came to be considered one of the outstanding Renaissance figures. Erasmus of Rotterdam, another of the famous humanists of the time, expressed enormous admiration for him: “Unless my great love for him deceives me,” he wrote, “I don’t think that nature has ever forged a more skillful, more ingenious, more circumspect, more refined character. He is the sweetest of friends, with whom I enjoy sharing both serious and humorous moments with great delight.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Thomas More had abundant and absorbing occupations both in the law tribunals and the King’s court. But realizing that his professional obligations might lead him to neglect his own home, he always tried to ensure that the most important thing in his life was being a good husband and a good father. In a letter to his eldest daughter written during a trip

that forced him to be away from home for some time he wrote: “I assure you that before letting my children and family suffer due to my lack of care, I am ready to spend my entire fortune and set aside business and professional concerns in order to dedicate myself entirely to you.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Indeed, he did all he could to ensure that his home was always a place of happiness and, at the same time, a small “family school.” Both Thomas himself and well-prepared teachers taught humanistic and scientific disciplines, along with Christian doctrine, to the five children living there. But in a letter to one of the tutors he made clear what is truly important in education: “The essential thing is to foster in them a virtuous life; study should occupy only a second place. Therefore they should study the subjects that lead them to be faithful to God, to love their neighbor, to be modest and

have Christian humility. Then they will attain the grace of a good reputation, and won't be frightened by the thought of death, since their hearts will be filled with true joy.”<sup>[3]</sup>

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SAINT JOSEMARIA had devotion to Saint Thomas More. In 1954 he named him intercessor of Opus Dei for relations with civil authorities. During his stays in Great Britain between 1958 and 1962, he frequently went to pray before his mortal remains in Canterbury. And he encouraged one of his sons to write a biography about this English saint, who seemed to him an excellent example of lay holiness, attained with God's grace in the middle of the world and confronting the cultural conflicts of his time.<sup>[4]</sup> For it is the lay faithful, ordinary Christians, who are called to illumine

with the light of the Gospel every sector of society: the family, the work place, the world of culture. Their role is “to testify how the Christian faith constitutes the only valid response to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society. This will be possible if the lay faithful will know how to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to again take up in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel.”<sup>[5]</sup>

Saint Thomas More was exemplary both in his service to civil society and in his contribution to deepening the culture of his time. Also today Christians are called to strive to transform the world, convinced that it belongs to us because it is our home and our homeland. “Knowing that we are children of God, called by

him, we cannot feel like strangers in our own home. We cannot go through this life as visitors in a foreign land nor walk through our streets with the fear of a person who treads on unknown ground. The world is ours because it belongs to our Father God. We are called to love this world, not another in which we think we might feel more comfortable; we need to love the specific people around us, in the specific challenges that lie ahead.”<sup>[6]</sup>

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THOMAS MORE attended Mass each day. On Sundays he took part in his parish choir. Despite his social standing, he didn’t expect any special treatment from other choir members. When some nobles remarked that the king might be displeased that his Lord High Chancellor didn’t seek to be treated

with greater deference in public, Thomas replied with his keen wit: “It is not possible for me to displease my lord the king while paying public homage to the Lord of my king.”<sup>[7]</sup> He loved his native land and his king with his whole heart. But he loved God above all else. Hence when the tragic moment arrived when he had to choose between being faithful to Christ or submitting to a law that violated his conscience, Thomas More embrace God’s will without reservation, knowing that his livelihood and even his life were at stake.

This heroic response in an extraordinary situation had actually been forged over many years of heroism in ordinary life. For example, Saint Thomas never decided any important matter without first having received our Lord in Holy Communion that day. He had recourse to insistent prayer

with faith for all his personal and family needs. He was generous and solicitous with his friends and took care of the poor in his neighborhood. In his personal life, he was temperate and austere. All this gave him “the confident inner strength that sustained him in adversity and in the face of death. His sanctity shone forth in his martyrdom, but it had been prepared by an entire life of work devoted to God and neighbor.”<sup>[8]</sup>

We too are called by God to live our Christian vocation amid the ordinary situations of daily life. Sometimes we will confront difficulties in the environment, including laws that offend against human dignity. Then is when we need to be faithful to the voice of God resounding in the depths of our conscience.<sup>[9]</sup> “Precisely because of the witness which he bore, even at the price of his life, to the primacy of truth over power,

Saint Thomas More is venerated as an imperishable example of moral integrity,” Saint John Paul II wrote. “And even outside the Church, particularly among those with responsibility for the destinies of peoples, he is acknowledged as a source of inspiration.”<sup>[10]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> Antonio Sicari, *Ritratti di santi*, vol. 1 p. 40.

<sup>[2]</sup> Andres Vazquez de Prada, *Sir Thomas More*, pp. 180-181.

<sup>[3]</sup> Mariano Fazio, *Contracorriente... hacia la libertad*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>[4]</sup> Cf. Andrew Hegarty, “St. Thomas More as Intercessor of Opus Dei,” in *Studia et Documenta*, no. 8 (2014), p. 91-124. Digital version at <https://opusdei.org/en/article/st-thomas-more-as-intercessor-of-opus-dei-2/>.

<sup>[5]</sup> Saint John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, no. 34.

<sup>[6]</sup> Fernando Ocáriz, *In the Light of the Gospel*, p. 84.

<sup>[7]</sup> Antonio Sicari, *Ritratti di santi*, vol. I, p. 40.

<sup>[8]</sup> Saint John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Proclaiming Thomas More Patron of Statesmen and Politicians*, 31 October 2000, no. 4.

<sup>[9]</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 16.

<sup>[10]</sup> Saint John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Proclaiming Thomas More Patron of Statesmen and Politicians*, 31 October 2000, no. 1.

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