

June 28, 2026—13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In 1529, Sir Thomas More was appointed Lord Chancellor of England; he was chief counselor to the king, with great influence and growing wealth. He possessed all that the ambitious and greedy wanted. Sir Thomas was a different kind of politician; he wanted to serve. He was a highly respected man of great integrity. All this was about to change under the whim of King Henry VIII! Henry wanted a male heir to the throne and thought he needed a divorce from his legitimate wife Queen Catherine to obtain one. He was determined to get one, even if it meant separating England from the Catholic Church. Despite the suffering he caused everyone around him, Henry never got the male heir.

All the nobles and prelates of England were required to sign the documents attesting to his divorce and making Henry the head of the Church in England; on pain of death, they could not refuse or remain silent. Sir Thomas More and Bishop John Fischer were among the few who defied the king. As a result, Sir Thomas lost his position and prestige and became increasingly impoverished until he was arrested, imprisoned, separated from his family and finally executed.

The words Jesus spoke some 1500 years earlier, which we heard in the Gospel today came true once again: **“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.”** Sir Thomas loved his wife and family, but especially his daughter Meg. The king allowed Meg to visit him in prison, in the Tower of London, with the idea that she could persuade him to sign and go back to his family. As much as it pained him, Thomas knew that he could not be true to God and to his conscience if he gave into his daughter’s plea.

St. Thomas knew that he had to love Jesus Christ first. Jesus had to come before money and prestige and even his own beloved family. His last words before he was beheaded were: **“I die the king’s good servant and God’s first.”**

The death of St. Thomas More looks like defeat in the eyes of the world; evil, in the person of King Henry VIII, won again. In a former parish, I would often talk about the heroic lives and deaths of the martyrs of the Church to try and inspire the children in the grade school. One of the eight grade boys asked me one day, why couldn’t the martyrs pretend to give in to their persecutors (not really mean it) and then later when they were out of danger return to the Catholic faith and thus save

their lives and do good. How one answers this question, whether a martyr or not, determines the purpose and outcome of life.

St. Paul gave us the clue to this question in the Second Reading this Sunday. He asked the Romans in his letter: **“Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”** Before baptism, we are sinners who lost friendship with God because of the sin of the first Adam. The Sacrament of Baptism unites us to the saving death of Jesus on the Cross. Water, in itself, has several meanings. It cleans us from dirt, but it also symbolizes death. Too much water, such as a flood, can kill people. God takes the natural meaning of water and gives it supernatural power in baptism. We are washed clean from sin, particularly Original Sin, putting sin to death by uniting us to the death of Christ.

Water also has a third meaning—life. Water is necessary for life; we can go longer without food than water. In baptism, water gives us the gift, not of human life, but of supernatural life; sanctifying grace is given to us. St. Paul continued: **“We were indeed buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.”** Each of the sacraments, in its own unique way, unites us to the death and glorious resurrection of Christ.

St. Paul points to this pattern in the death and resurrection of Christ and says that our lives must also reflect it. This reading concluded with: **“Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.”** When we reach the age of reason, we have a part to play in our salvation. We are called to make conscious choices each day to die to sin and live for Christ.

Getting back to St. Thomas More and the meaning of martyrdom. Yes, we should try to live long and well in this life without forgetting that life in this world is only temporary. We are meant to live forever with God. We must live with integrity like St. Thomas More who was not willing to sacrifice his faith in Jesus and His Church to gain the wealth and honors of this world. He knew the words of Jesus that we heard in the Gospel: **“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”** This means that if we treasure life only in this world’s goods and honors, we will eventually lose them because one day we must leave everything behind in death. If we die with Christ, that is, die to self for love of God and one another, even to the point of martyrdom, we will find life, true life, in eternity. God offers us a treasure greater than anything this world can offer.

Even though King Henry caused much suffering for St. Thomas, he didn't become bitter and hate the world or the king. On the scaffold, he said, "**I die the king's good servant and God's first.**" He meant what he said! He made his choice for heaven!