

ST. THOMAS MORE NAMED PATRON OF POLITICIANS John Paul II Pens Apostolic Letter Explaining Why

VATICAN CITY, OCT. 31, 2000 (ZENIT.org).- The world's politicians and statesmen now have a patron for their inspiration.

It is St. Thomas More, killed by Henry VIII for refusing to take the oath of allegiance which proclaimed the king head of the Church in England.

John Paul II made the official announcement today when he signed and published an apostolic letter which explains the reasons that led him to decide on the 16th-century statesman.

Above all, the Pontiff stated that he made this decision in response to petitions he received.

"Recently," he wrote, "several heads of State and government, numerous political figures, and some Episcopal Conferences and individual bishops, have asked me to proclaim St. Thomas More the Patron of Statesmen and Politicians."

"Those supporting this petition include people from different political, cultural, and religious allegiances, and this is a sign of the deep and widespread interest in the thought and activity of this outstanding statesman," the letter states.

The Pope's decision was made in the context of the Jubilee of parliamentarians and statesmen, set for this weekend in Rome.

The Holy Father said there were many reasons for taking this decision at this time. Above all, "the need felt by the world of politics and public administration for credible role models able to indicate the path of truth at a time in history when difficult challenges and crucial responsibilities are increasing."

"Today," the Pontiff stressed, "in fact, strongly innovative economic forces are reshaping social structures; on one hand, scientific achievements in the area of biotechnology underline the need to defend human life at all its different stages, while the promises of a new society, successfully presented to a bewildered public opinion, urgently demand clear political decisions in favor of the family, young people, the elderly, and the marginalized."

In this context, John Paul II sees the need "to turn to the example of St.

Thomas More, who distinguished himself by his constant fidelity to legitimate authority and institutions precisely in his intention to serve not power but the supreme ideal of justice."

This is the important lesson of the English chancellor: "His life teaches us that government is above all an exercise of virtue. Unwavering in this rigorous moral stance, this English statesman placed his own public activity at the service of the person, especially if that person was weak or poor; he dealt with social controversies with a superb sense of fairness; he was vigorously committed to favoring and defending the family; he supported the all-round education of the young."

John Paul II's apostolic letter describes the most important moments in More's political career, as well as the dramatic events that ended his life.

Born in London in 1478, More was a very cultured man. The Pope pointed out that he was a friend of important figures of the Renaissance, such as Desiderius and Erasmus of Rotterdam.

His religious sentiment led him to pursue virtue through the assiduous practice of asceticism. However, he felt himself called to marriage. He married Jane Colt in 1505, who bore him four children.

After her death in 1511, he married Alice Middleton, a widow with one daughter. He was an affectionate and faithful husband and father, deeply involved in his children's religious, moral and intellectual education. Family life gave him ample opportunity for prayer in common and lectio divina, as well as for wholesome relaxation. He attended Mass daily.

More was elected to Parliament for the first time in 1504. He served the crown in diplomatic and commercial missions on the Continent and, in 1523, became Speaker of the House of Commons.

Esteemed for his moral integrity, sharpness of mind, his open and humorous character, and his extraordinary learning, he was appointed by the king to the post of Lord Chancellor in 1529.

However, three years later, not wishing to support Henry VIII's intention to take control of the Church in England, he resigned, suffering poverty with his family and being deserted by false friends.

Given his inflexible firmness in rejecting any compromise with his conscience, the king had him imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1534. During his trial, he defended his convictions on the indissolubility of marriage, the respect due to the juridical patrimony of Christian civilization, and the freedom of the Church in relations with the state.

Condemned by the court, More was beheaded.

In 1886, together with 53 other martyrs, including Bishop John Fisher, More was beatified by Pope Leo XIII. Pius XI canonized him and Bishop Fisher in 1935, on the fourth centenary of his martyrdom.

After presenting the English chancellor as a model of man and sanctity, John Paul II states: "I am confident, therefore, that the proclamation of the outstanding figure of St. Thomas More as Patron of Statesmen and Politicians, will redound to the good of society. Likewise, it is a gesture fully in keeping with the spirit of the Great Jubilee, which carries us into the Third Christian Millennium."

In the last paragraph of the apostolic letter, the Pontiff writes the solemn formula: "Therefore, after due consideration and willingly acceding to the petitions addressed to me, I establish and declare St. Thomas More the heavenly Patron of Statesmen and Politicians, and I decree that he be ascribed all the liturgical honors and privileges that, according to law, belong to the Patrons of categories of people."