

Lives of the Saints...

Saint Thomas Becket

Shawn Briggs

... From every shires end
Of England, down to Canterbury they
wend,
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
To give his help to them when they were
sick.¹

THUS FAR CHAUCER. For those unfamiliar with his monumental work, *The Canterbury Tales*, I will surmise. A large number of pilgrims on their way to Canterbury Cathedral stop at a tavern for the evening. The narrator sets about describing each character and explores the particular motives for their journey. While these travelers differ in social rank, they share one thing in common, they have all come to visit the shrine of a holy saint.

This article is not about *The Canterbury Tales*. Instead, I want to talk about the “blissful martyr” mentioned in its prologue. The saint whom the people of every rank from monk to miller sought throughout the whole of England for a miracle. Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury (1162-1170). Better known as St. Thomas of Canterbury.

¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. Nevill Coghill (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 19.

Below: “The seal of St. Thomas,” reproduced in John Morris, *The Life and Martyrdom of Saint Thomas Becket*, 88.



In *Church History: A Complete History of the Catholic Church to the Present Day*, Fr. John Laux PhD refers to this saint as the man who “delayed the Reformation in England by more than three hundred year.”² In fact, it was not until the reign of the contemptible King Henry VIII that the saints memory began to be assaulted and his name intentionally blotted out. Prayer books and Psalters from the sixteenth century attest to this act of vandalism. Many manuscripts housed by the national library of the United Kingdom show where his name had been scratched from

² Fr. John Laux, *Church History: A Complete History of the Catholic Church to the Present Day* (Tan Books, 2012), 337-341.

the divine office.³

The iconoclasts and thieves of the English deformation were not content with simply erasing history. Their rancor led them to despoil the saints tomb and burn his bones. We can take solace in a slice of irony. A relic of St. Thomas belonging to the Basilica of Esztergom in Hungary was placed on display in the crypt at Canterbury Cathedral in 2016.⁴ Mass was offered by the local Catholic parish therein. Even though this historic church is now occupied by a heretical religious sect, the glory of St. Thomas refuses to be extinguished. The Anglican Church continues to commemorate the feast day of this very Catholic saint; who stood against his own King Henry for the liberty of the Church in the twelfth century.

In 1154 after the death of Stephen of Blois, Henry II was crowned King of England. While a capable ruler, his

³ “Erasing Becket,” British Library, published September 9, 2011, <https://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2011/09/erasing-becket.html>.

⁴ “Becket Relic Arrives at Canterbury Cathedral,” Canterbury Cathedral, published May 13, 2016, <https://www.canterbury-cathedral.org/whats-on/news/2016/05/13/hungarians-bring-becket-week-to-canterbury/>.

legacy has been overshadowed by other monarchs of his own lineage. The likes of ancestor William the Conqueror and son Richard the Lionheart. The sole man whom the young Henry held in his fullest confidence was Thomas Becket, and he demonstrated this trust and favor by making him chancellor. In this position, Thomas met with dignitaries and indulged in the finery of the court. He attended Henry on his wars in France and as Fr. Laux records, “his chivalric exploits in Normandy at the head of a large body of knights were more befitting the career of a military adventurer than that of a churchman.”⁵

This brings us to one of the primary critiques of our saint by the anti-Catholic revisionist historian. The argument goes, “Your so-called holy saint led a life of luxury and took part in campaigns of genocide. How can a man of God condone such violence?”

St. Thomas was indeed a sinner and partook in the diplomatic struggles of his day, which included accompanying his King in battle. But Saul of Tarsus persecute the early Church before he was knocked from his horse and became Paul. In his Epistle to the Ephesians,

⁵ Laux, *Church History*, 337-341.

Continued Next Page

Roberto de Mattei/Continued from page 7

throughout Christendom. It ignited popular devotion to the Miraculous Medal of the Rue du Bac and helped to hasten the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

Among the saints and servants of God who have prayed in the Chapel of the Apparition in Sant’Andrea delle Fratte, it is enough to recall Saint John Bosco, Saint Therese of Lisieux, and Saint Maximilian Kolbe. It was on January 20, 1917, the 75th anniversary of the apparition, that Kolbe, while listening to a retelling of the story of the conversion of Ratisbonne, conceived the idea of founding his Militia Immaculata, with the purpose of “seeking the conversion of sinners, heretics, schismatics, Jews, etc., and especially of Masons; and the sanctification of all under the patronage of and through the Immaculate Blessed Virgin Mary.”¹¹

¹¹ Maximilian Kolbe chose to celebrate his First Mass at the Altar of the Apparition on April 29, 1918. Father Ricciardi has transcribed this detail (translated) from Kolbe’s personal register of Mass intentions: “Altar of the Miracle, Church of Sant’Andrea delle Fratte: for the conversion of P. Petkow [Grand Master of Polish Masonry], of schismatics, non-Catholics, masons, etc.” Cf. Father ANTONIO RICCIARDI, *Beato Massimiliano Maria Kolbe OFM*, Edizioni agiografiche, in the care of the Genral THE REMNANT ~ www.RemnantNewspaper.com

Towards the Reign of Mary

At the Rue du Bac, at La Salette, at Lourdes, at Fatima, the Blessed Mother

**Nothing is impossible
for the Blessed
Mother, she who is
the royal dispenser
of graces, when she
is invoked by ardent
and devout hearts.**

chose innocent souls to transmit her messages to the world. In Rome, she appeared to a sinner, to a heart hardened

Postulation of the Conventual Franciscans, Rome 1971, p. 57

by pride, to an enemy of the Church. A Jew by birth, a revolutionary in his thinking, Ratisbonne seemed to prefigure the modern world, incredulous, hard of heart, obstinate in his errors.

And yet it only took the apparition of Our Lady, one single action on her part, to make Ratisbonne fall to his knees and instantly understand – according to his own words given in the canonical investigation – “the horror of his state, the deformity of sin, the beauty of the Catholic Religion.” His conversion was perfect and instantaneous, just like that of Saint Paul the Apostle: the darkness of his unbelief and Judaism was instantly dispelled by the brightness of the truth. The Blessed Mother – “living, great, majestic, most beautiful, and merciful” – displayed her traditional qualities as Queen and Mother: both power and mercy. But in order to intervene, the Madonna requires the cooperation of human beings: the Miraculous Medal, the *Memorare*, the insistent prayers of the Baron de Buisnières and of Count de La Ferronnays, perhaps through an imperceptible gesture of good will by Ratisbonne, are all parts of the story not to be overlooked in the big picture of this conversion story.

Nothing is impossible for the Blessed Mother, she who is the royal dispenser of graces, when she is invoked by ardent and devout hearts. “When men decide to cooperate with the grace of God, then wonderful things happen in history: the conversion of the Roman Empire, the formation of the culture of the Middle Ages, the re-conquest of Spain beginning at Covadonga – these are all events of this sort, which happen as the fruit of the great resurrections of the soul to which people are also susceptible.”¹²

In the face of the scourge of atheist communism that threatens humanity today, let us therefore pray to the Blessed Mother and ask her to once again show her power and her mercy. In the same way in which she converted the Jew Ratisbonne and established her reign in his heart, may she also grant in our day the conversion of the world, the establishment of Her reign and the reign of her Divine Son, and the triumph of the Church over the Revolution. ■

Translated by Giuseppe Pellegrino

¹² PLINIO CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, *Rivoluzione e Contro-Rivoluzione*, 3rd Italian edition, Cristianità, Piacenza 1977, p. 152.