

he teaches us to “put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth.”⁶ When St. Thomas received Holy Orders, he discarded his soiled worldly garment and put on the new man. As Jacobus de Voragine records in *The Golden Legend*, “The new dignity immediately made him a different and perfect man.”⁷ He took up his Archbishopric in all sincerity and began to apply himself to the corporal works of mercy.

some of the monks would quip that the Archbishop had yet to master his appetite.

This was not the only act of charity for which the Archbishop was unjustly mocked. Intentionally rising each day in the early hours before Lauds, he would wash the feet of thirteen poor. He provided them with a meal and dispensed four silver pennies to each. Despite performing these deeds before

see, this claim is completely dubious considering the chain of events following his opposition to the King of England. Including the seizure of property belonging to his family and associates, half a decade in exile, and a violent death. A prudent man seeking wealth and power does not bite the hand that feeds him.

The Church’s liberty at stake, Thomas made an enemy of his close friend and

excommunicate any tenant of the king without the king’s license.

2. That no appeal be made for any cause whatever to the Apostolic See, except with the permission of the king and his officials.
3. That no Archbishop, Bishop, or other dignitary, may attend a summons from the Pope without the king’s leave.⁹

St. Thomas did not sign the constitutions but gave verbal consent after a great deal of pressure from his fellow bishops. Soon feeling remorse, he sent word to the king that he rescinded his oath. This incensed Henry, who then began to apply pressure against his former confidant and those who would not submit to his demands. Lamenting his complicity in the affair, Thomas ceased saying mass and traveled to see the pope for absolution. When he reached Pope Alexander III, then residing in France, the Archbishop proclaimed his unworthiness and offered his resignation.

His termination rejected by the Supreme Pontiff, he was told to bear his suffering with patience. Our saint would spend the next several years in exile. For a time, he studied and performed acts of penance at Pontigny Abbey. Meanwhile, Henry II sent appeals to Rome to prevent his kingdom from falling under interdict. His nobles did their best to slander the name of the Archbishop of Canterbury, but for all their sophistry, they were unsuccessful. The pope soon made Thomas his legate over England.

John Morris presents the following letter in his, *Life and Martyrdom of Saint Thomas Becket*. Addressed from Thomas to Henry II, it clearly demonstrates the newfound vigor he felt after being vindicated by Alexander III.

My lord, the daughter of Zion is held captive in your kingdom. The Spouse of the Great King is oppressed by her enemies, afflicted by those who ought most to honor her, and especially by you; release her, reinstate her, and

⁹ John Morris, *The Life and Martyrdom of Saint Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury* (Burns and Oats, 1885) 236-237



MURDER OF THOMAS À BECKET.

Before succumbing to decay, a hair shirt worn by St. Thomas was recorded among the relics housed in Canterbury Cathedral. A testament to his change from chancellor to churchman. He would wear the shirt under his alb in order to conceal the penance from his brothers. Unaware of the extra bulk it produced,

⁶ Ephesians 4:23-28 (Douay-Rheims Bible).

⁷ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints, Volume I*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton University Press, 1995) 59.

dawn to detract attention, word spread of his righteousness among the people. Those critical of him claimed that he was no better than the hypocrites in the synagogue who sought the honor of men.⁸

Another typical assault against St. Thomas is the claim that he was an obstinate man who sought to aggrandize his own wealth and power. As we will

⁸ Matthew 6:2 (Douay-Rheims Bible).

benefactor Henry II. Desiring to codify the alleged customs observed by the predecessors of his realm, Henry moved to draft a document infringing on the authority of the Church in England. The result was the Constitutions of Clarendon. A series of sixteen articles which Pope Alexander III would go on to condemn. Some of the more offensive articles which the Church rejected include:

1. That a Bishop may not

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