

December 29

Martdom of Thomas Becket

Thomas Becket (1118-1170) pastor and martyr

On December 29, 1170 the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket was killed in Canterbury Cathedral at the close of the vesper service.

Thomas was born in London in 1118 into a Norman family of merchants. After completing brilliant law studies in London and Paris, he rapidly earned the favor of the English King Henry II, and was named Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1155. A friend and confidant of the king, Becket now became his faithful servant as well, sharing the toil and concerns of government as well as the glamour and excitement of life at court.

The king, noting Becket's administrative skills and the conflicts between the royal family and high-ranking English prelates, named him Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162, despite Becket's objections. Thomas felt called to make a profound conversion in his own life so that he would be able to carry out the serious ministry he had received in a responsible way. He adopted the customs and dress of the monks of his time, and invited the poor to sit at his table.

In his pastoral activity, Becket insisted that the Church remain outside the King's sphere of influence, and because he accepted no compromises, he was forced into a long exile in France.

Abandoned by his fellow bishops, weakly defended by Rome, and treated with hostility by the nobility, he eventually returned to Canterbury in November 1170 following a momentary reconciliation with the King. Several days later, when Becket refused to revoke the excommunication of the Church of England's enemies, the King ordered him struck down with a sword in front of the altar of his cathedral.

Although he could have escaped, Thomas Becket accepted to lose his life in witness to the Gospel.

PRAYER

O God,
you allowed Thomas Becket to pour out his blood
for the sake of justice and freedom in your church,
and to fight the peaceful battle of faith
according to the rules of the Gospel:
grant that we, like him, may be ready
to lose our lives for Christ's love,
and to give up honor in this world
for the sake of the glory of your kingdom,
blessed now and forever.

BIBLICAL READINGS

1 Kings 19:9-13a; Heb 13:10-16; Mt 10:28-30

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, martyr

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

Thomas Becket, bishop and martyr (Roman and Ambrosian calendar)

John, apostle and evangelist (Spanish-Mozarabic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (20 kiyahk/tahsas):

Haggai (6th cent. BC), prophet (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:

Thomas Becket, bishop and witness to the point of bloodshed in England

MARONITES:

The holy innocents, martyrs (see on December 28)

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

14.000 infants slain by Herod

Marcellus the Unsleeping One (d. ca. 485), monk

OLD CATHOLICS:

David (11th-10th cent. BC), king of Israel