



A Pastoral Letter to the People of God on the Feast of St. John Fisher

Happy Feast Day to all of you. This past Sunday, I was sitting in our Chapel at the rectory; it was Father's Day. It was quiet, and it was just me and Jesus. I said something at the end of Mass this past Sunday that got some chuckles, but also some tears from people after Mass. I said: "No one may ever call me *Dad*, but thousands call me Father!" I am truly blessed to be called your spiritual father in these days. My role as spiritual father is not something I wish to ever take lightly, nor abdicate from. I feel so blessed beyond words that God has called me here to be your shepherd.

However our parish came to be known as *St. John Fisher*, which is lost to the annals of history, this great saint was chosen to be our patron. Our parish patron is extraordinary. He and his companion martyr on this day— St. Thomas More — both stood the face of trials, persecution, and threat of losing their lives. Neither of them subsided, but rather rose up with courage and great dignity.

You have heard me say it before, and I will say it again. There are no coincidences with God. He does not work in luck or fortune — just His Divine Providence. We each find ourselves in a parish dedicated to St. John Fisher— a man of God, a priest, a Bishop, a Cardinal — who defended the faith against an unruly King. We live in a world where each of us faces the common criticisms, jeers, and even hostility in our own family — all for our belief in Jesus and what His Church teaches.

Despite the hostility of the world, we have our parish, which is a light for each of us. Today, in these eerie days we live in, we have such profound joy when we gather together to worship. In a world where there is so much brokenness and isolation, we meet in small groups to build a better and brighter life for our community and our children. After the deaths of St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More, I am sure there was so much pain. But the Church persevered in England, as did St. Thomas More's wife and children. We only know much of St. Thomas More's heroic virtue because of what his wife and daughter have shared. Our voice and testimony give the same hope and witness to our world today!

Rochester, England — where St. John Fisher served — is not a largely populated area; nor is it a prestigious *See* to possess as a Bishop. Multiple times, Cardinal John Fisher was offered other dioceses to lead, but he always refused. He saw his small community as his children whom he could lead to Heaven. He just wanted to be their spiritual father. On the day of his beheading, Cardinal John Fisher put on his finest suit and refused to do any penance that day (he was doing profound penances before). When his caregivers asked why, he responded, "Today is my wedding day! I am going to meet my Jesus!" He wore a Martyr's Crown, simply for refusing to obey the crown of England.

As I reflected on the life of St. John Fisher, this was the moment in the chapel that Sunday in which I was moved by his heroic life. Thank you for calling me your father. Please know of my deep admiration, love, and respect for each of you. I will place you and your families upon the Altar on this great feast day and ask God's profound blessing upon you! In return, please ask St. John Fisher to pray that I may have a heart of love, as he did, to serve and not count the cost.

I hope to see you this evening for Holy Mass at 7:15pm, followed by our feast day party. I hope too that this feast day celebration may be a large hallmark of our parish, a day that is celebrated with great joy and honor each year. May St. John Fisher, St. Thomas More, and all the English Martyrs pray for us!

In the Blood of the English Martyrs,

Fr. Steve Mateja