



It is so fitting that we celebrate the Solemnity of the Holy Family on the first Sunday after Christmas. It forever reminds us of the wonderful, mind-boggling, truth that God chose to be born and raised as a member of a real human family. Jesus himself depended on his mother and father to help him learn his prayers and grow in wisdom and grace. It would be impossible to overestimate the importance of family life, after all, God through the example of Jesus has put his eternal seal of approval on it! By God's design, marriage has been established as an exclusive and permanent sacramental covenant between one man and one woman in which the couple enjoy a profound personal unity of body, heart, and soul which is open to fertility. As the fruit of this profound unity children are conceived and learn from their parents and siblings in an atmosphere of love and devotion the true meaning of life and how to love God and neighbor as Jesus taught us.

Unfortunately, in our day, the family and family life is under severe attack by what John Paul II called the "culture of death." Like it or not, we are all affected, or should I say "infected" to some degree by this culture of death in which we are immersed. It is a constant battle for us to oppose our culture and follow the eternal truths of the Gospel which are at times demanding and diametrically opposed to all forms of selfishness. How can we

learn to sacrifice ourselves for others without complaint—nay, even with joy? How can we understand in a practical way the truths that Jesus taught us: "the greatest among you will be the servant to all"; "It is more blessed to give than to receive"; "What you do to the least you do to me"; "every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart"; etc.? It is impossible to fully live these truths unless our lives are profoundly rooted in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mother Teresa rightly placed a great deal of emphasis on family life as the source and school of love. On the Feast of the Holy Family, let us try to humbly listen to the words of a modern-day Saint, Mother Teresa of Calcutta:

"Where does love begin? At home. Let us learn to love in our family. In our own family we may have very poor people and we do not notice them. We have no time to smile, no time to talk to each other. Let us bring that love that tenderness into our own home and you will see the difference.

"Make your house, your family, another Nazareth where love, peace, joy and unity reign, for love begins at home. You must start there and make your home the center of burning love. You must be the hope of eternal happiness to your wife, your husband, your child, to your grandfather, grandmother, to whoever is connected with you.

"I think the world today is upside down, and is suffering so much, because there is so very little love in the homes and in family life. We have no time for our children, we have no time for each other; there is no time to enjoy each other. If we could only bring back into our lives the life that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph lived in Nazareth, if we could make our homes another Nazareth, I think that peace and joy would reign in the world."

I think Mother Teresa in her simplicity is profoundly right! May the Good Lord help us to see the eternal beauty of the Holy Family and give us the grace to foster true love in our own families: the love that takes time to notice the needs of others, to be tender, forgiving, and quick to sacrifice. I know, easier said than done, but at the end of the day, can you think of anything more worthy to pray and fight for? Happy Feast Day!!

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples



Saint Thomas Becket

Feast Day: December 29

Born: Circa 1118

Died: December 29, 1170

Patron: Roman Catholic Diocesan Clergy

Canonized: February 21, 1173

Saint Thomas was born in London, England. From his early youth, Thomas was educated in religion and holiness. After his childhood, he was taught at a monastery and later at a school in London. After the death of both his parents, Thomas decided to finish his schooling by studying canon Law. He was successful in his studies and was made secretary to one of the courts of London. Thomas loved his life. He spent money on clothes, entertainment, hunting, and good times. A strong friendship developed between Thomas and King Henry II and the king made Thomas chancellor of England at the age of 36. Unfortunately, Henry II wanted complete control of his kingdom, including the Church. He wanted to take some powers away from the Church, and he needed an archbishop to support him. Henry believed Thomas could do this. When Henry felt it advantageous to make his chancellor the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas gave him fair warning: he might not accept all of Henry's intrusions into Church affairs. Nevertheless, in 1162 Thomas was made archbishop, resigned his chancellorship, and reformed his whole way of life.

Faced with the responsibility of leading the people of God, Thomas sold his mansion and went to live in a monastery. He sold his rich clothes and furnishings and gave the money to the poor. His personality was the same, but more noticeable were his generosity and determination to protect the Church. Thomas opposed Henry's taxation of the Church. He refused to allow Henry to make Church appointments that suited him and blocked his other attempts to control the Church. The king turned on the archbishop, threatening imprisonment, and death.

Thomas fled to France and took refuge in a Cistercian monastery for six years. Both Thomas and the King appealed to the pope. After the pope condemned some of Henry's demands, Thomas returned to England. There was peace until Henry had his son crowned by bishops who supported him instead of the archbishop of Canterbury. When the pope cut these bishops off from the Church, Thomas upheld that decision. One night, in a rage, the humiliated king exclaimed before his knights, "Will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?" Four knights rode to the monastery where Thomas lived. They failed in making Thomas change what he believed was his obedience to the pope. When Thomas went into the cathedral to pray, the monks begged him to lock the doors. Thomas insisted that the doors remain unbolted. The knights entered the cathedral and murdered Thomas near the high altar by the bishop's chair. Thomas's last words were, "I accept death for the name of Jesus and for the Church."

Thomas was the most famous martyr of the Middle Ages. People called Thomas a saint, and Henry II did public penance to be absolved. Thomas was associated with numerous miracles, both during his life and after his death. The following of Saint Thomas Becket grew rapidly, with pilgrims flocking to Canterbury Cathedral to seek his intercession and healing power. Miracles were reported to occur at Thomas's tomb and many pilgrimages were made there. Within ten years of his death, 703 healing miracles had been recorded at his tomb.

Reflection: No one becomes a saint without struggle, especially struggles within yourself. Thomas knew he must stand firm in defense of truth and right, even at the cost of his life. We also must take a stand in the face of pressures... against dishonesty, deceit, destruction of life,... even at the cost of material wealth, popularity, promotion, or something as minor as convenience.