

By
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The Every Catholic Guy

A Man for All Seasons

Anyone who has seen the 1966 movie *A Man for All Seasons* with Paul Scofield and Robert Shaw is already familiar with St. Thomas More. The movie is a classic! It was made at a time when Hollywood still knew how to make a movie that honored Catholic sensitivities and teachings. But I realize I'm from a different generation, so I'm betting that most of you haven't read it. If you haven't, please do so. You'll love it! It's available at Ignatius Press and on Amazon.

Sir Thomas More was the chancellor of England from 1529 to 1532. He and King Henry VIII were friends and confidants. However, when Henry broke from the Catholic Church over his desire to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn, he threw More into prison because he refused to sign the king's Oath of Supremacy, which acknowledged Henry's supremacy over the Church in England and no longer the pope. Thomas would never serve a king in place of God and His vicar, even if it would cost him everything.

Thomas demonstrated this one morning when the Duke of Norfolk, More's close friend, found More serving Mass, as he often did, and told him he was dishonoring the king. Thomas said, "Do you think that the king, your master and mine, will be offended with me for serving God, his master and mine?"

Thomas' wife Alice was very worried about him. She didn't want him to be beheaded by order of the king. She visited him in prison in the Tower of London on day and tried to persuade Thomas to take the Oath of Supremacy. The king would forgive him, she said, and he'd be able to live the rest of his life with his family in peace and honor.

"How much longer do you think I shall live?" asked Thomas. "Why, a good twenty years yet," she replied.

"Twenty years!" he said gravely. "And for the sake of another twenty years' comfort in this life you would have me throw away a happiness in the next world that would last forever and face the prospect of a life of endless misery? Surely, that would be a very bad bargain!"

Thomas never gave up his faith, but rather gave his life for it. He was beheaded and became a martyr.

While I like telling a bit about St. Thomas More, that's not really the point of this installment. The point of this installment is that we all have an obligation to become saints, and the best way to learn how to do that is by reading about the lives of those saints who've gone on before us.

During the first several years after my conversion, I read about 100 lives of the saints. That's no hyperbole. And I didn't read the thumbnail biographies from *Butler's Lives of the Saints* either.

I'm talking about 100 books. The reason I did this was because of the advice my godfather had given me, and good advice it was too.

Everyone has a different journey to sanctity, because no two people are alike. Therefore, reading the lives of the saints can help us to sort of map out our own journey. Although we all have different journeys on the road toward sanctity, and no two saints are alike, there are spiritual principles that are common to us all.

I recall reading the lives of the saints in those early years and being edified by all of them. I'd say this saint is great, and that saint really had it going on. But they all seemed so far above anything I could ever hope to achieve. I thought I could try to emulate this saint's virtue or that saint's virtue, but I was never convinced that achieving sainthood was possible. I knew intellectually it was possible, because Jesus told us to do it, and He'd never tell us to do the impossible. Subjectively? I just didn't see how it could be done.

Then I had my breakthrough.

God honored my tenacity by continuing to read lives of the saints. I once read the biography of St. Dominic Savio, written by St. John Bosco—a saint writing about a saint. Of course, St. Dominic Savio was one of the boys St. John Bosco took under his wing, and both are incorrupt today. Even though St. Dominic was a young teen and I was a grown man, by the time I finished that book something clicked for me. I recall thinking, "If Dominic Savio could become a saint, I can become a saint."

I realize that most Catholics don't even think about growing in holiness. Those who do likely feel the same way I did—it ain't likely to happen for me. Well, let me tell you that we can do it, because Jesus said we *must* do it.

Even after coming to the realization sainthood was possible, even for the likes of me, I still got discouraged... a lot. I spent years thinking that God was just going to leave me in my mediocrity so as to avoid losing me all together. But a spiritual director I had—a great priest—told me something I really needed to hear. He told me I felt that way and got discouraged a lot simply because I was growing in the spiritual life.

You can and should strive for sanctity. For holiness. For sainthood. You have a moral obligation to, and it really can be done. But you need to take a few important steps to get started. First, you have to make up your mind that nothing is more important than God and your relationship to him. Don't merely be His acquaintance. Be one of His best friends.

Next, make an appointment to sit down with your confessor and make a general confession. That would be confessing everything in your life from your baptism. I know those sins have already been forgiven, but this is perfectly valid. Besides, it helps you focus on the most important things in your life that need to change.

Third, if not your confessor, find another good, holy priest who will consent to becoming your spiritual director. You need a priest who lives and promotes traditional spirituality. You can't do this without a good spiritual director, so this is important.

Finally, read every book you can get your hands on about the lives of the saints. Also, a good spiritual director is likely to want to assign you some books for spiritual reading. Do as he says. That's why he's called a spiritual director, and not a recommender.