

# THE PASTOR'S CORNER

## The Martyrdom of St. Thomas a' Becket

*The Feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury will be celebrated as a solemnity in our parish church, St. Thomas, on Tuesday, December 29th at the 8:30 am Mass. Music will be provided by Vincent Mateo and a singer. When the feast of a patron is devoutly celebrated with a visit to a church, and with the recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, a person may receive a plenary indulgence for themselves or on behalf of another. Confession and Communion should take place sometime within the week, before or after.*

**T**his week marks the 850th anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Thomas Becket, one of the patrons of our combined parish and the namesake of our church in Cornwall on Hudson. On December 29, 1170, the Archbishop of Canterbury was killed at the behest of England's King Henry II in the sanctuary of the cathedral. Henry and Becket had been friends, and Becket had served the King as Chancellor, but when the King decided to have Becket made Archbishop of the Primatial See of the Catholic Faith in England (and ordained a priest then), the erstwhile confidant of the king decided to change his ways. Fighting for the rights and privileges of the Church in England, Thomas excommunicated several of Henry's supporters. The king was said to have complained before four of his knights, "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?" It was famously reprised in T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* but is reported more accurately by Edward Grim, one of the monks of the Cathedral, who witnessed the saint's death. Following are excerpts from his account:

The murderers followed him; 'Absolve', they cried, 'and restore to communion those whom you have excommunicated and restore their powers to those whom you have suspended.' He answered, 'There has been no satisfaction, and I will not absolve them.'

'Then you shall die,' they cried, 'and receive what you deserve.' 'I am ready,' he replied, 'to die for my Lord, that in my blood the Church may obtain liberty and peace. But in the name of Almighty God, I forbid you to hurt my people whether clerk or lay.'

Then they lay sacrilegious hands on him, pulling and dragging him that they may kill him outside the church, or carry him away a prisoner. But he could not be forced away from the pillar. Then the unconquered martyr seeing the hour at hand which should put an end to this miserable life and give him straightway the crown of immortality promised by the Lord, inclined his neck as one who prays and joining his hands, he lifted them up, and commended

his cause and that of the Church to God, to St. Mary, and to the blessed martyr Denys. Scarce had he said the words than the wicked knight, fearing lest he should be rescued by the people and escape alive, leapt upon him suddenly and wounded this lamb who was sacrificed to God on the head, cutting off the top of the crown which the sacred unction of the chrism had dedicated to God; and by the same blow he wounded the arm of him who tells this.

Then he received a second blow on the head but still stood firm. At the third blow he fell on his knees and elbows, offering himself a living victim, and saying in a low voice, 'For the Name of Jesus and the protection of the Church I am ready to embrace death.' Then the third knight inflicted a terrible wound as he lay, by which the sword was broken against the pavement, and the crown which was large was separated from the head. The fourth knight prevented

any from interfering so that the others might freely perpetrate the murder. As to the fifth, no knight but that clerk who had entered with the knights, that a fifth blow might not be wanting to the martyr who was in other things like to Christ, he put his foot on the neck of the holy priest and precious martyr, and, horrible to say, scattered his brain and blood over the pavement, calling out to the others, 'Let us away, knights; he will rise no more.'

