

July 21, 2018 Bound For Glory Homily: The English martyr Sir Thomas Moore was surely one of the most influential and powerful men of the first half of the Sixteenth century. A lawyer of exceptional intelligence and ability, Sir Thomas served as chancellor under King Henry VIII and was one of his most trusted advisors. His relationship with the King took a dramatic turn for the worse after he publicly opposed his sovereign's decision to marry a second time without ecclesiastical approval. His insubordination resulted in his arrest and imprisonment in the infamous Tower of London. From his cell he wrote an astonishing letter to his beloved daughter, Margaret. He hoped to allay her fears and to restore peace to her anguished soul. His words are a remarkable testimony of faith.

“His majesty (Henry VIII) has done me such great good with respect to spiritual profit that trust among all the great benefits he has heaped so abundantly on me, I count my imprisonment the very greatest. I cannot, therefore, mistrust the grace of God.”

In conclusion, he writes,

“Do not let your mind be troubled over anything that shall happen to me in this world. Nothing can come but what God wills. And I am sure that whatever that may be, it indeed shall be the best.”

It turned out to be his final letter. Shortly thereafter, he was beheaded. He died for his faith.

In recent history, some of the most illustrious letters have been penned by Christians while in prison: In the mid 1960's the civil rights leader Martin Luther King wrote an impassioned letter from a Birmingham, Alabama jail cell in which he defended himself and his strategy in confronting racial discrimination; Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor in Germany at the time of the Second World War, wrote several letters to his flock before his execution by the Nazis in 1945. They were later published, and received wide acclaim; and Alfred Delp, S.J., a Jesuit priest who kept a diary while languishing in a German prison cell during the Second World War. His words reflect a remarkable faith under fire. He, too, was executed in 1945.

The martyrs who died for their faith in Christ showed no signs of gloom, despair or hopelessness. Their suffering did not come as a surprise. Indeed, their Master and Lord, Christ, spoke candidly and openly of the cost of discipleship. They recognized that many trials must be endured before entering the Kingdom of Heaven.

In today's second reading, St. Paul, writing from a Roman prison cell informs his readers that he finds joy in his suffering. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul says, “I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake”. (Col. 1:24) It may seem a little far-fetched for one to rejoice in his sufferings. After all, if your pastor today were arrested on false charges and sent to Riker's Island in New York City for twenty years, it is highly unlikely the he would be shouting “Hooray”. But bear in mind that St. Paul suffers IN FAITH; he suffers as an apostle by the will of God. In the divine plan, his suffering serves a purpose; it is not wasted. Everything Paul will say will be dependent upon the fact that he has been chosen by the Lord and that he holds his office by the will of God. He is undoubtedly aware that those who proclaim the gospel must

endure many sufferings. Some will receive the Word of God with joy; others persecute both the Apostles and the newly baptized Christians. The church in every age is a suffering church.

How can we account for the courage and the serenity of the Christian martyrs? St. Paul gives us one possible explanation. It is the hope for glory (Col. 1:27). A heavenly reward awaits the faithful Christian.

In our secular age, suffering seems pointless; it serves no purpose whatsoever. In the face of innocent suffering and a painful death, life seems, at the end of the day, absurd. Misfortunes can weigh us down and leave us confused, looking for answers that are simply not available. Only if one fails to see the Hand of God at work is life unfair. If we patiently endure the trials God sends us, we will attain glory, not only in this life but also in the next. St. Thomas More understood this very well.

In his first letter, St. Peter echoes the wisdom of his fellow apostle, St. Paul, by an appeal he makes to his flock; "But rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly" (1 Peter.4:13), and "But whoever is made to suffer as a Christian should not be ashamed, but glorify God because of his name". (1 Peter.4:16)

We are all bound for glory.

Amen!