



The other evening, I sat down to watch the Met game on television. I turned on the game and went to the refrigerator to get a can of soda. By the time I got back, we were already losing six to nothing. So, as any good man would do, I decided to go channel surfing. There are certain movies, that however often I have seen them, immediately make me stop and watch them, even with the commercials. I think of *Shawshank* Redemption, *Hoosiers*, *Rudy*, *Patton* and *A Few Good Men*. I suppose none of these films would be called *chick flicks*. My remote rarely stops at the Lifetime Channel. A movie that I love, *A Man for All Seasons*, was on and I immediately started watching it. As you may know, this movie, based on a play written by Robert Bolt, starring Paul Scofield, Robert Shaw and Orson Welles, tells the compelling story of Thomas More. Thomas More was an Englishman who lived in the sixteenth century. He was a brilliant writer and scholar, a lawyer, married and the father of four children, and a close friend of Henry VIII, the King of England. The King thought so highly of Thomas that he made him the Lord Chancellor of England, the equivalent of the prime minister.

King Henry was not happy with his wife Catherine because she had not given him any sons to be his heirs. Meanwhile, an attractive lady of the royal court, Anne Boleyn, had caught his eye and he wished to divorce his wife Catherine and marry Anne. To do so, he needed an annulment from the Pope. The Pope did not think that Henry had a genuine case for an annulment and refuses him. This decision leads Henry to declare himself the leader of the English Church and to renounce the authority of the Pope. Thus, began the Anglican religion. Most Catholics went along with this since the day to day activity of the Church seemed to change very little. However, Henry wanted absolute loyalty and demanded all the clergy and political leaders to take an oath recognizing him as the Supreme leader of the Church of England. To refuse to do so would lead to execution.

Thomas More faced a battle of conscience. He was a devout Catholic and loyal to his King. What is he to do? The entire movie turns on this question of conscience. More's closest friends and even his family try to convince him to sign the oath; they tell him everyone is signing it, and it doesn't matter. However, More in a very quiet but determined way remains silent as he refuses to take the oath. He does not speak against the King, but he will not sign the oath. Finally, the King is a fit of anger had Thomas More executed. Thomas More was declared a saint of the Catholic Church and the patron of lawyers.

In today's readings, we read about the cost of being faithful to God. The prophet Jeremiah speaks about his sufferings at the hands of others: *"I hear the whisperings of many: 'Terror on every side! Denounce! let us denounce him!' All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine.* Our Gospel speaks to the first proclaimers of the Gospels and to the generations to come: Jesus said, *and do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.* Over the course of the first two centuries of the church, there was great persecution of the Christians. The Roman government was determined to put an end to Christianity. To follow Jesus was at the risk of your life. Every generation of Catholics has had its martyrs. The persecution of Christians is not just ancient history. *The Centre for the Study of Global Christianity in the United States estimates that 100,000 Christians now die every year, targeted because of their faith – that is 11 every hour. 3,000 Christians of Mosul who were driven from their homes in northern Iraq last week by Islamist fanatics who broadcast a fatwa from the loudspeakers of the city's mosques ordering them to convert to Islam, submit to its rule, and pay a religious levy, or be put to death if they stayed. 80 per cent of all acts of religious discrimination in the world today are directed at Christians. Christians faced some form of discrimination in 139 countries, almost three-quarters of the world's nations.*

In the Nineteenth Century, there was fierce prejudice in America against Catholic immigrants. Catholics suffered in terms of employment, education and political life. The Catholic school system was created to combat the religious bigotry that existed in many public school at that time. Even as late as 1960, there was a fear that if the nation elected John Kennedy president, the pope would be running America. Thanks be to God, such direct persecution against Christians in our nation is almost extinct. Four of our Supreme Court Justices are Catholics. The speaker of the House is Catholic and our former vice-President, Joseph Biden, are Catholics. Catholics hold the highest positions in industry, government, and education.

Gratefully, today, we Catholics are free to practice our faith without interference. Still, I do believe that you and I face a very deceptive and seductive challenge in living our faith. Comedians are quick to ridicule and make fun of Christians. The media delights in

any perceived or real failure of Catholics. I always notice that the media makes sure we know that the criminal was a *former altar server*. That does not seem to do reported for other religious. I have no doubt that our stances on life and the marriage make us targets of secular society.

Again, with few exceptions, one being my favorite show *Blue Bloods*, we rarely see on television people whose faith shape how they live and act. When was the last time you saw a character say, I need to go to bed to get up on time for Mass? The message of our culture is that it is ok to be religious but please don't be serious about it. Oftentimes, television religious figures are portrayed as bigots and hypocrites. Please keep your beliefs and thoughts to yourself is the message we are given. Our athletes and Hollywood stars often lead lives that are shocking in their moral practices, yet they are highly admired by many.

I love our nation and I am proud to be an American. During World War II, a famous German Lutheran minister, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote a book called *The Cost of Discipleship*. He was calling Christians to revolt against the Nazi, and this choice eventually cost him his life. A challenging question for me to ask ourselves is: *what does it cost me to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Have I ever been ridiculed for living my faith? Have I wrestled with my conscience in making decisions about my family, my lifestyle, my work, my day to day living? What does it cost me to be a follower of Jesus?*

When Thomas More was about to be beheaded, his last words were, *I die the King's good servant, but God's first*. May this Holy Eucharist lead us to be faithful disciples of Jesus