

Holy Christmas: Day 5 December 29

Feast of St. Thomas Becket

Thomas Becket also known as Saint Thomas of Canterbury, born December 21, 1120 was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1162 until his murder on December 29, 1170. He is remembered as a saint and martyr by both the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion. He engaged in conflict with Henry II of England over the rights and privileges of the Church and was murdered by followers of the king in Canterbury Cathedral. Soon after his death, he was declared a saint.

Since my years in college as a Sociology & Theatre major, I have been fascinated by the poetry, drama, and artistic expression of this saint. In the midst of the quiet days of Christmas in my retirement I reflect again on this saint. Appreciation to modern research tools like Wikipedia for helping me to remember:

Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* are poetic tales of a company of pilgrims on their pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. In 1884, England's poet laureate Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote *Becket*, a play about Thomas Becket and Henry II. Modern works based on the story of Thomas Becket include T. S. Eliot's play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, Jean Anouilh's play *Becket*, which was made into a movie with the same title. The struggle between 12th century Church and King of England's power is a theme of Ken Follett's novel, [The Pillars of the Earth](#), of which one of the last scenes features the murder of Thomas Becket.

In this 21st Century as we come to the end of a year (2019) that has been full of political activity & division, violence, struggles and uncertainties of what it means to be persons of faith in a changing and diverse culture – reflecting on the meaning of this saint as Christians in the holy season of Christmas is a good thing.

T.S. Elliot offers some thoughts for reflection:

“Destiny waits in the hand of God, not in the hands of statesmen.” (Murder in the Cathedral)

A martyr, a saint, is always made by the design of God, for (God's) love of (others), to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to (God's) ways. A martyrdom is never the design of (a person); for the true martyr is (one) who has become the instrument of God, who has lost (one's) will in the will of God, not lost it but found it, for (one) has found freedom in submission to God. The martyr no longer desires anything for (one's self), not even the glory of martyrdom. (Murder in the Cathedral)

William H. Wilson (Bill)+