

# Thomas More

*Man of Conscience*

Born: 1477

Died: 1535

Feast Day:

22 June



**DERRY DIOCESAN  
CATECHETICAL  
CENTRE**

Thomas More was an English lawyer, judge, social philosopher, author, statesman, and noted Renaissance humanist. He also served Henry VIII as Lord High Chancellor of England from October 1529 to May 1532. He wrote *Utopia*, published in 1516, depicting a society regulated by natural virtues.

Thomas was born in London. He was the son of Sir John More, a successful lawyer and judge and his wife Agnes. He was the second of six children. Thomas was educated at St. Anthony's School, then considered one of London's best schools. From 1490 to 1492, Thomas served John Morton, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor of England, as a household page. Morton nominated Thomas for a place at the University of Oxford. Thomas received a classical education. He became proficient in both Latin and Greek. After two years he left Oxford to begin legal training in London. In 1496 he became a student at Lincoln's Inn, one of the Inns of Court, where he remained until 1502, when he was called to the Bar.

According to his friend, the theologian Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, Thomas once seriously contemplated abandoning his legal career to become a monk. Between 1503 and 1504 he lived near the Carthusian monastery outside the walls of London and joined in the monks' spiritual exercises. Although he deeply admired their piety, Thomas ultimately decided to remain a layman, standing for election to Parliament in 1504 and marrying the following year.

Thomas married Jane Colt. The couple had four children: Margaret, Elizabeth, Cicely, and John. Jane died in 1511. Despite the advice of friends and the customs of the time, Thomas married 30 days after the death of Jane. His new bride was Alice Middleton, a widow. She was to be head of the household and care for his small children. The speed of the marriage was so unusual that Thomas had to get permission before he could marry.

Thomas had no children from his second marriage, although he raised Alice's daughter from her previous marriage as his own. He also became the guardian of two young girls: Anne Cresacre who would eventually marry his son, John More and Margaret Giggs (later Clement) who was the only member of his family to witness his execution (she died on the 35th anniversary of that execution, and her daughter married Thomas' nephew William Rastell).

An affectionate father, Thomas wrote letters to his children whenever he was away on legal or government business, and encouraged them to write to him often. He insisted upon giving his daughters the same classical education as his son, an unusual attitude at the time. His eldest daughter, Margaret, was fluent in Greek and Latin.

Thomas opposed the Protestant Reformation, and wrote polemics against the theology of Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin and William Tyndale. He also opposed Henry VIII's separation from the Catholic Church, refusing to acknowledge Henry as supreme head of the Church of England and the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. After refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy, he was convicted of treason and executed. On his execution, he was reported to have said: "*I die the King's good servant, and God's first*".

Thomas More was canonized in 1935 by Pope Pius XI. The Academy Award-winning film "*A Man For All Seasons*" portrayed the events that led to his martyrdom.

Thomas More is the patron saint of statesmen and politicians.