

# John Fisher

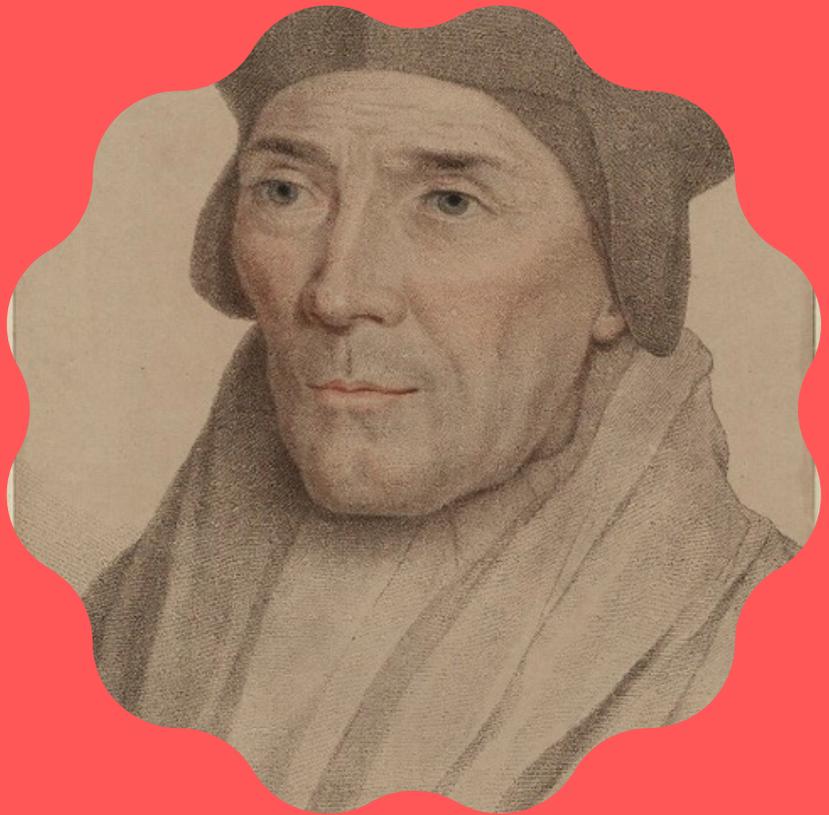
*A scholar, churchman and advisor to royalty*

Born: 1469

Died: 1535

Feast Day:

22 June



John Fisher by Francesco Bartolozzi, after Hans Holbein the Younger  
stipple engraving printed in colours, published 1793  
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**DERRY DIOCESAN  
CATECHETICAL  
CENTRE**

John was born in Beverley, Yorkshire. He was the son of a wool-merchant. He went to university at Cambridge where he graduated and was ordained priest in 1491. He became chaplain to Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of King Henry VII, who helped him to reform Cambridge. He was a scholar and man of simple, austere life and prayer; his only pleasure was collecting books.

Realising the need for better education, especially of the clergy, John brought the famous Erasmus of Rotterdam to Cambridge as professor of Divinity and Greek. In 1504 Fisher was appointed both as chancellor of the University and as bishop of Rochester. His reputation as a preacher earned him the honour of being the chosen preacher at the funerals of Lady Margaret Beaufort and her son King Henry VII. At 47, he began the serious study of Greek and Hebrew.

He was ordained Bishop of Rochester. Rochester was a poor English diocese and for the next thirty-one years John devoted the same care to it as he had devoted to the promotion of education in the university. He was opposed to Lutheran ideas and wrote vigorously against them. He may have had a part in the writing of Henry VIII's Defence of the seven sacraments against Martin Luther, for which the Pope gave him the title, "*defender of the faith*," still used by kings and queens of England.

However, when Henry VIII sought to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon, John argued vigorously against it and against the king's subsequent attempts to make himself head of the Church of England.

On 16 April, 1534 Henry had him imprisoned in the Tower of London together with Sir Thomas More. Both had refused to take the Oath of Succession acknowledging the children of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn as legitimate heirs to the throne. While in prison awaiting trial, he was made a cardinal.

His trial took place in Westminster Hall on June 17th 1535. He was found guilty of treason because he would not acknowledge the King as Supreme Head of the Church in England. Five days later when called to his execution, he put on his best clothes and, though weak, walked to the scaffold where he told the crowd: "*Christian people, I am come here to die for the faith of Christ's Holy Catholic Church.*" His head was impaled on London Bridge until fourteen days later it was removed to make way for that of Thomas More.

He is patron of Rochester and companion martyr with Thomas More. Both celebrate their feast day on 22 June.