

## Whom Will We Serve?

Back when I was in high school, a teacher once told me that it is impossible for us to relate to people who lived in the past because we live in a completely different time under completely different circumstances. Shortly after the teacher told me this, we began reading Homer's Iliad.

The Iliad recounts the Trojan War. A prince of Troy kidnapped the queen of the Greek city-state Sparta. In response Sparta formed an alliance with the other Greek city-states in order to attack Troy and bring Helen home. There is a moment in the Iliad when the champion of Troy, a warrior named Hector, is preparing to go into battle against the Greeks. But before he leaves, his wife comes up to him with their young son, pleading with Hector not to go into a battle which will surely result in his death.

This was a moment I found entirely relatable. Over three thousand years ago a soldier was torn between his duty to his family and his duty to his country and to his Gods.

We can absolutely understand people that have lived before us because human nature does not change, ever.

What about the saints? Many people feel that the saints lived so long ago, and were so holy, that we cannot relate to them. Take Ignatius of Loyola for example. He was a very holy man, the founder of the Jesuit order. How can we identify with such a man?

Well, before he was Ignatius of Loyola, he was Inigo Lopez. Inigo Lopez came from a wealthy family. He liked to dress in the finest clothes, attend all the popular parties, and impress beautiful women with his physical prowess and good looks. He was particularly proud of how he looked in tights.

We may not be able to relate to Ignatius of Loyala, but Inigo Lopez sounds like any number of people I grew up with.

Another saint whose life is becoming increasingly relevant to us today, is Saint Thomas More. More was executed by the state because he had a very clear idea of where the authority of the state must give way to the authority of God.

Thomas More was a chancellor of England. He was one of the king's closest advisors. Time and again Sir Thomas is faced with having to choose between his faith and his king, between the laws of God and the laws of man. And each time, he chooses God. And by doing so, he loses his position, his office, his influence, his friends, his great household and his wealth.

He does this because he believes in the Word of God. He believes in the Resurrection. He believes that there is a life after this one and that the decisions we make in this life affect how we will live in the next. He believes that man is immortal and will be held accountable for his actions.

More was imprisoned in the Tower of London for his refusal to give in to the king. And at one point his wife was allowed to visit him on the condition that she convince him to support King Henry VIII's claim as head of the Church in England, a claim that would have put Henry's authority above the Pope. Like Hector, three thousand years earlier, More was put in an agonizing position of having to choose. His wife Alice begged More to give in, to put his duty to his family above his duty to God. And Thomas More answered:

“How long, dear wife, do you think I shall live if I do what you ask me?”

“For at least twenty years,” she said.

“Well,” he replied, “if you had said twenty thousand years, that would have been something; but it would, indeed, be a very poor thing to live even that number of years, and run the risk of losing my God in eternity.”

Thomas More lived his life according to his central belief in everlasting life won for us by our Lord on the cross. The Resurrection is the very foundation of our faith. It separates Jesus from every other world figure and gives unique weight to His teachings.

Many times we are told that the teachings of Jesus are not very different from a number of other historical figures. And it is true that there have been many who have led exemplary lives, taught wise doctrines, and even died for the truth. But only one has risen again. Among all those figures, some of humanity’s greatest teachers, only of Christ is it said that He “rose again on the third day, in fulfillment of the scriptures.”

Why is that so crucial? First of all in Christ’s Resurrection, goodness and power finally unite. Christ was supremely good, but at the end of the day what good would His goodness have done if evil triumphed? Second, in Christ’s Resurrection, love proves that it is stronger than death. In Christ and in His Resurrection, a wild new hope dawns for mankind, the hope that if we stay united to Him through the love that results from faith and grace, we will rise with Him. We will rise from our tombs and live with Him forever in the vast and eternal adventure of heaven.

No one else offers such a victory and such a hope, because no one else has risen from the dead to offer it – only Christ, Our Lord.

The Resurrection is the climax of the Incarnation. It confirms the divinity of Christ and all the things which He did and taught. It fulfills all the divine

promises made for us. The risen Christ, the conqueror of sin and death, is the source of our justification and our Resurrection. The Resurrection procures for us the grace of being adopted sons and daughters of God, a real share in the life of the only begotten Son. It shows us that at the end of time we will be reunited with our bodies. (Cccc 131)

It has long been a Catholic tradition to have a crucifix in our homes. But sadly in recent years this practice seems to have declined, particularly a crucifix in our bedrooms. Why specifically the bedroom?

The crucifix reminds us that Jesus, the perfect man, who led the perfect life, fulfilled His mission only through suffering. It reminds us that Jesus was hated, excluded and insulted. He was denounced as evil. These are the very things that He said would make us blessed. He lived them before us. We who are His followers should expect no less. This is one of the reasons we keep a crucifix over our altars.

And it is especially useful to keep one in our bedroom because the bedroom is the place of rest and reflection. It is where we start our day and end our day. It is removed from the hustle and bustle of our daily lives. It is the perfect place to remind us that earth is not heaven, but it is the path to heaven. A crucifix on the wall helps keep things in perspective, the perspective of Christ.

By contemplating Christ's death and resurrection, Saint Thomas More was able to stay faithful, to do the right thing, and be true to his friendship with Jesus. We need a vibrant, true faith in the Resurrection so that we will have a reason to make the necessary sacrifices to follow Christ the way we should. His victory can give us victory in our struggles, just as it did for St. Thomas.

The Resurrection of Christ, the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep, is the promise that we will one day live with God the way we were meant to. This life prepares us for the next.

Before he was executed, Saint Thomas More said “I die his majesty's good servant, but God's first.” Every day seems to bring us closer to the moment when we too will be called to choose between the laws of God and the laws of man, even at the risk of becoming martyrs. Abortion, same sex marriage, gender identity, homosexuality, all of these involve cases where man seeks to put his law above the law of God. And for holding fast to our beliefs we are hated, excluded, insulted and denounced as evil.

So what will we choose? From the perspective of Jesus, there are only two choices, to follow Him and believe and live, or reject Him, disbelieve, and die, the path of the sheep or the path of the goats. There is no middle third way. When the time comes, whom will we choose to serve?