

MAY EASTER JOYS BE YOURS ON GLORIOUS EASTER MORN

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BLESSED JOHN FISHER IS FAMED FOR VIRTUES AND SCHOLARSHIP

(Continued from Page 17)

time in 1534. Monsignor Angelo Mercati, Prefect of the Vatican Archives, has transmitted to the Historic Section of the Congregation of Rites, in which he is a Consultor, a communication which reads in part as follows:—

"I am happy to give you a note which helps to ascertain the date of the birth of Blessed Fisher. Mr. Lloyd of Cambridge, in search of Vatican Archives documents in connection with his history of his University and its colleges, came upon a petition of the Blessed, who declaring that he was in his twenty-second year, asked for a dispensation of age to be ordained a priest. In June of 1491, Innocent VIII granted the dispensation; evidently the petition could not have been much earlier. So we arrive at the date 1469. Mr. Lloyd, reserving publication of the document, mentions it on Page 391, and subsequent pages, of his beautiful book just out, 'The Early History of Christ's College,' and there justly remarks: 'Since Fisher became Master in Grammar in 1483, when fourteen years of age, precocity must be added to his other qualities.'"

In the said controversy which began when King Henry VIII fell in love with Anne Boleyn, and declared his intention of divorcing his legitimate wife, Catherine of Arragon, Bishop Fisher resolutely sustained the legitimacy and indissolubility of the King's marriage and therefore, in public opinion, was held as the strongest exponent of Christian morals and the integrity of the Catholic Faith.

REFUSAL TO TAKE OATH

Easter, 1534, fell on April 17. Six days before news reached England that Pope Clement VII, persisting in his refusal to yield, against divine and human laws, to the caprice of King Henry VIII had confirmed the validity of his marriage with his legitimate wife, Queen Catherine of Arragon. Blessed John Fisher was summoned by the Archbishop of Canterbury—the apostate Cranmer—to appear on April 13, Easter Monday, before a commission to take the oath. This oath had been imposed after the Act of Succession voted by Parliament, which on the one hand declared the marriage of Catherine of Arragon with Henry VIII illegitimate and gave the succession to the throne to any children the King might have by Anne Boleyn, and on the other prohibited "Faith, Loyalty and Obedience" to any foreign authority. John Fisher accepted the part regarding the succession to the throne, because a difference on this question might have involved a danger for the State, as England had already experienced in the long War of the Roses. But he refused that part of the oath regarding the marriage of the Queen and loyalty and obedience to the Pope. Nay, for what concerned the Pope, he was ready to promise not to reopen the question, but for what regarded the Pope he could make no concession.

Therefore, on presenting himself before the Commission on April 13, John Fisher asked time to reflect, because the formula of the oath which had been laid before him had not yet been approved by Parliament. Cranmer was inclined to treat with leniency the aged and infirm Bishop who was held in such deep veneration in England. But Henry VIII intervened in the matter and judged that all this reverence and the excuses advanced by Fisher meant his disapproval of his second marriage and the recognition of the authority of the Pope. Thus it was that by his order, John Fisher was imprisoned in the Tower of London on April 17. He remained there until June 22 of the following year, the day on which he made the supreme sacrifice. He thus passed a second Easter, the last of his life, in prison.

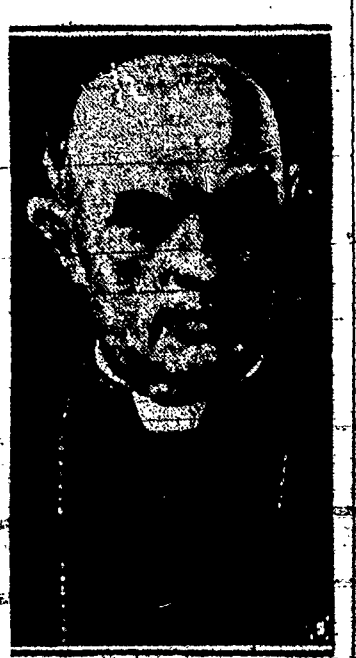
SUFFERINGS IN PRISON

The conditions under which the venerable old man passed his time in the Tower of London are shown in these words which he wrote to Thomas Cromwell: "I have no shirt, nor stockings, the few other clothes are in tatters and I am so ragged that I am ashamed. Notwithstanding I would bear all willingly if I could shelter myself from the cold. In regard to the food God knows how often it is insufficient. I beg you to have pity on me and to make them give me things indispensable required by my age and above all by my health."

Bishop Lee who visited him in prison, said that he seemed a skeleton on account of his great thinness. Fisher fell ill very often and had to be visited by doctors. His sufferings had not even the comfort of religious practices because, while they had left him his breviary, it seems he was not permitted either to celebrate Mass or to hear it, or to take Holy Communion although there were two churches within the precincts of the Tower of London. Nevertheless, the Bishop employed his time in prison in compiling two spiritual works that are as it were the testament of all his life: "Spiritual Consolation" dedicated to his sister, Elizabeth, a Dominican nun, and "The Ways of Perfect Religion," in which he describes the efforts of the soul seeking its God.

In November, 1534, Parliament voted the Act of Supremacy by which the King was proclaimed spiritual head of the Church of England. At the same time Parliament condemned both John Fisher and Thomas More to life imprisonment for not having accepted integrally the oath of succession. However, Parliament wished to open some way in which the two great men could escape the heavier penalty of death. It inserted, therefore in the Bill of Su-

Paris Prelate Recalls Christ's Words of Peace



Cardinal Verdier

By HIS EXCELLENCY JEAN CARDINAL VERDIER, S. D. O.

Paris — To the Catholics of the United States:

The Cardinal Archbishop of Paris is happy and proud to greet you through you to wish for the triumph of the world a happy Easter.

Easter is not a feast of peace; the gloriously risen Christ has hardly come from out the tomb. There is still to be done, it seems to us, at the fruits of His death, His first words that He addressed to His Apostles: "Peace be to you." Peace in the hearts of all men, that the world may be beautiful.

And this is the message that we, who are Catholics, must always faithfully preserve and propagate. She loves indeed justice in the relations of nations as well as in the relations of individuals. Her peace shall always rule our individual and collective action, but especially she asks that the children of the same Father Who is in Heaven, pursue the noble ideal of peace.

Let us not forget that every work of Christ is charity. For charity, which is the queen of virtues and also the greatest of them, is the will of God—"God is charity"—requires that in all the vicissitudes of life, in all discussions inherent to human affairs, we must always have as our first aim the love of eternal love, that is to say peace.

Catholics, let us ask of God in our most ardent prayers for that peace which we wish we cannot have happiness here below. But let us recall the axiom dear to our fathers: "Help yourself and Heaven will help you." To our prayers let us add the practice of virtues which will restore among us properly and peace. I wish to preach the cult of justice, charity for all and especially those who suffer, moderation in seeking the good things of this world, patience in time of inevitable privations, and above all, confidence in God.

Your country, Catholics of the United States, is gloriously blessed by her sons, by the magnificent soaring in her activity, by the boldness of her enterprises, by her sense of reality, imposes admiration upon us all. And she has not forgotten, day that she has such a powerful influence on the destinies of the world? And the great American Catholic family with its four Carrioles, its devoted Bishops and Clergy, with its admirable religious and social institutions, with its proverbial generosity, is it not one of the greatest forces and most beautiful hopes of the future?

At this hour, so profoundly troubled, let us unite your prayers with ours, your wishes and your works with our wishes and our works, so that our hearts may be restored to the world prosperity and peace.

Thus let us merit the eternal gratitude of humanity.

English Archbishop Writes Church Ever Will Be Triumphant

By THE MOST REV. RICHARD DOWNEY, Liverpool

It is with joy in the Risen Saviour that I send you Easter greetings in this year of the canonization of our glorious martyr, Bishop Fisher of Rochester and St. Thomas More. After four hundred years they are rehabilitated with the English people at large. Men may take the Church captive, crucify it and bury it away, but as surely as Christ rises again from the dead, so surely must the Church rise in triumph. Rejoicing in the progress of the Church in the United States of America, with every best greeting and blessing.

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HONOR HASTENED DEATH

The Pope had hoped that the elevation to the Purple would have had the result of alleviating the sufferings and hastening the liberation of the Bishop from prison, but instead it had exactly the opposite effect. The King's only reply to the announcement of the Pope's grace was to order that he had already been more than a year in prison, was "Let the Pope also send the red hat to John Fisher, he will not find the head on which to place it." In fact on June 17 he had to undergo fresh cross-examination. Accused of high treason for having declared that the King is not the supreme head of the Church, he replied: "Even if I had said the words for which I am reproved, I should not have said them 'maliciously' and the terms of the Act of Parliament take into account only those who maliciously contradict the supremacy of the King." But this very just observation was unavailing; the judge, warned beforehand by the King, ordered that he be condemned to death. The only indulgence granted him by the King was that he should be beheaded and not hanged and quartered which was the death reserved for traitors.

On June 22, warned at three in the morning that it was the day fixed for his execution, he asked to be allowed to sleep another two hours, as he had not sufficiently rested. Awakening after that additional rest, he took off the hair-shirt that he always wore, and asked for a clean white shirt, the best that could be found among his clothes and his hand of fur. To the servant who wondered at these ornaments, he said: "Do you not know that today is a day of happiness and that I am going to my wedding and must needs therefore adorn myself as best possible?" At 9 o'clock, while the procession went towards the place of execution, he opened the Gospel, praying God to let him meet with some comforting thought. His eyes fell on the words of the Gospel of St. John: "Now this is eternal life; that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent. I have glorified Thee on earth; and now glorify Thou Me, O Father, with Thyself, with the glory which Thou hast before the world was, with Thee." Arrived at the steps leading to the block, he said smilingly: "Let us go; my old legs, do your duty, now the way is short and it will be before the world was, with Thee." And in fact all noted the unusual quickness and energy with which he mounted the few steps that led to the block. "My heart," he said, "ray of sunlight struck his face and he said: 'Come ye to Him and be enlightened; and your faces shall not be confounded.'"

MARTYR'S LAST WORDS

And in that last moment he was again offered life and liberty, on the condition that he recognized the royal supremacy. But he, turning to the people, said with a voice extraordinarily strong for such a weak and infirm body: "I have come here to die for the Faith of the Catholic Church and I thank God for it. Help me by your prayers so that at the moment when death strikes me I may remain firm and unshaken in the Catholic Faith. I pray God Almighty to save the King and this Kingdom and to

Strange Easter Customs

Among the peculiar customs in connection with the celebration of Easter was one in Bavaria in the 10th century in which the priest interspersed his sermon with risous sayings. One of these stories was a description of how the devil tries to keep the doors of hell locked against the descending Christ. Then the speaker would draw a moral.

But the custom at length gave rise to grave abuses of the ward of God, and was accordingly prohibited by Clement X in the 17th century and by Maximilian XII and the Bishops of Bavaria in the 18th century.

Catholic lay societies, each should have a committee to read the CATHOLIC COURIER and other Catholic periodicals to be informed of present trends.

Easter Greetings

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