

# 'A Tale Of Two Cities'

Funds raised by Bishop Kearney in New World Rochester raises Memorial Church in Rochester, England and returns Holy Mass to ancient See of St. John Fisher

By FATHER RICHARD TORMEY, Chaplain of Our Lady of Mercy High School

THE HISTORY of men and institutions reveals that beyond applying talents, grace and luck to career problems, great leaders often deliberately follow the shadows of an ideal predecessor to inspire their major works. Emulation of a hero-saint of the past is not uncommon practice even for bishops.

A 16th century scholar martyr, Bishop John Fisher of Rochester, England, has been the strongest historical inspiration of Bishop Kearney in his administration of the New World Diocese of Rochester.

As the focus of Bishop Kearney's personal devotion, as the model for much of his own public service and as the spirit behind two great diocesan movements of charity and education, St. John Fisher has put an indelible mark on two decades of Rochester church history.

Proud of his inheritance of the episcopal title of Bishop of Rochester - borne so honorably from 1501 to 1535 by this English martyr bishop, Bishop Kearney has repeatedly exalted the name and fame of St. John Fisher of Rochester for the edification of the people of this Diocese.

The English Catholic Diocese of Rochester no longer exists, having been dissolved by the English government following Bishop Fisher's execution in 1535 in defense of the Faith. At the time of its demise, it was the second oldest diocese in England, dating from 602 when Saint Augustine consecrated "Saint Peter" as the first Bishop of Rochester.

When English Catholics fled to the United States, they carried with them the memory of the newly founded American hierarchy.

The Catholic Bishops of the country were dispersed and deprived of all titles, rights and jurisdiction, so Bishop Fisher was never succeeded in old Rochester. His shepherdless flock was so distressed that no single Mass was celebrated in his society for another 419 years.

The Diocese of Rochester became part of the state Church of England and even till today uses Bishop Fisher's Cathedral. When the Catholic hierarchy was restored in England in the middle 1800's, after many years of persecution following Henry VIII, new Catholic dioceses were organized by the Vatican because the Protestant Church of England still held the name of the ancient Catholic sees.

IN MARCH OF 1868 Pope Pius IX revived the old title of St. John Fisher's diocese by establishing a new Diocese of Rochester in New York State and naming Rev. Bernard J. McQuaid of Newark, N.J., as the first Bishop of the See.

Seventy years and four Bishops later, when Bishop Kearney came to Rochester the time seemed right for historical acknowledgement of Rochester's Catholic heritage for John Fisher had just been named a saint (May 19, 1935) and the significance of his role in the Reformation was gaining wide appreciation among scholars.

A man of saintly prayer, austere in tastes yet the companion of royalty, honored with every academic distinction of his age, famous for writing and preaching skills, respected for administrative skill and tireless priestly zeal, John Fisher's character brightened the sad pages of England's betrayal of the Faith.

Bishop Fisher's priestly courage had challenged the tyrant-state and shed his blood in defense of human dignity, therefore, Bishop Kearney felt that the life story of the saint of Rochester had a message for 20th century Americans.

In sermons and banquet addresses Bishop Kearney frequently told of the courage and holiness of his pre-



Bishop Kearney presents original edition of book written by St. John Fisher, martyred Bishop of old Rochester, England, to library of St. John Fisher College.

decessor. Emphasizing Bishop Fisher's message that all men owe allegiance, even to death to the Great King of Heaven, the Bishop drew pointed analogies that modern betrayal of the Church for the service of materialism or political power or social prestige was as reprehensible as the treason of those who bowed to the will of King Henry VIII.

TO MAKE St. John Fisher better known, Bishop Kearney in 1942 requested the Vatican to authorize the American Diocese of Rochester to celebrate June 22 as the Feast of St. John Fisher and to issue a special Office for the clergy of the Diocese to recite on that day.

Making himself familiar with the educational career of St. John Fisher, Bishop Kearney admired the culture and scholarship which prompted Erasmus to write of him 400 years ago: "There is no more learned or holier man in all England."

Entering Cambridge as a country lad of 14, Fisher studied ardently, took his B.A. and M.A. just before ordination there in 1491, and was chosen successively Master of his college, Vice-chancellor and finally Chancellor of the University in 1504. Jointly with Lady Margaret Beaufort, mother of King Henry VIII, Dr. Fisher founded two new colleges at the University, helping Cambridge match Oxford in academic excellence.

Rochester's long wanted college for men was named for this scholar-Bishop on some ten years before the ground was broken on East Avenue in 1950.

Asking the Basilian Fathers to erect and staff the school Bishop Kearney revealed that he had been waiting for years to name this first men's college "St. John Fisher," hoping that under the saint's patronage it would be "a center of scholarship and culture."

A larger-than-life wooden statue of Bishop Fisher stands in the entrance foyer of the college showing the scholarly features of a sober and determined churchman. Carved in Italy, after the famous 18th century portrait of Holbein, the image recalls for students and faculty the most distinguished scholar and professor of old England.

Bishop Kearney also was proud to have St. John Fisher's almost last words carved over the main entrance of the college. As the condemned Bishop was being taken to the scaffold on June 22, 1535 he read aloud from the New Testament the quotation: "This is eternal life, to know Thee the One True God and Him Whom Thou Hast Sent."

Students who read these chiseled words on the college wall also ponder that St. John Fisher quietly added, as he closed the Bible: "Here is learning enough for me to my life's end."

A few paces from the entrance of the college another tie with old-world Rochester attests Bishop Kearney's regard for St. John. During construction of the school a stone from Bishop Fisher's Cathedral of St. Andrew in old Rochester was sent to Bishop Kearney by the Anglican Dean of the historic church which now serves Anglican worshippers. At the Bishop's request the rough block

was formally cemented into the college wall when the administration building was dedicated.

The most dramatic evidence of Bishop Kearney's devotion to St. John Fisher was a collection of \$30,000 raised in the Diocese in 1952 to build a new church in Rochester England to honor the martyr-Bishop.

Begging for contributions "to bring the Blessed Sacrament back to the tabernacle in the old parish of St. John Fisher," Bishop Kearney asked his people on June 1, 1952 for a cash gift of "real Christian charity" in order to restore Christ in ancient Rochester "a village sanctified by the martyrdom of England's greatest Bishop."

Prompt, generous response of the laity in 150 parishes and a special gift from the diocesan clergy and chaplains in the armed forces, made it possible for Bishop Kearney to send a \$30,000 check to Bishop Cyril Cowderoy of the Diocese of Southwark, England. The generous check was delivered to the Catholics of Rochester, England, on July 28, 1952 at special rites on the site of the new church by Monsignor Donald M. Cleary, chaplain of Catholic students at Cornell University, and Father Richard Tormey, of Our Lady of Mercy High School, Rochester. These priests were designated by Bishop Kearney to present the gift from this Diocese.

THE FULL STORY of this amazing hands-across-the-sea generosity to provide a memorial for St. John Fisher began in 1949 when the late Monsignor Edward M. Lyons, rector

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