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## St. John Fisher

Story by  
Lee Strong

Illustration by  
Amy Sundstrom

### Rochester martyr defended papal rule

**O**n June 22, 1535, a frail 66-year-old man mounted a scaffold on Tower Hill near the Tower of London. After a brief address to the crowd, a prayer for England and King Henry VIII — and a request for prayers for himself — he lay down and was beheaded.

His crime: He did not accept Henry VIII as the head of the church in England.

Thus died Cardinal John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, England, the only cardinal martyred for the faith. He is also the patron of the Diocese of Rochester, N.Y., which contains two institutions named after him: St. John Fisher College, and St. John of Rochester Parish. (See accompanying story.)

Two weeks after his execution, Cardinal Fisher was joined in death by Thomas More, former chancellor of England, who along with the cardinal was among the few individuals in England willing to defend the papacy against Henry's control.

In what Cardinal Fisher himself might have seen as ironic, his head, which had been impaled on London Bridge, was tossed in the Thames River to be replaced by the head of More.

In the centuries since, the two saints have been linked together, with More often overshadowing the cardinal.

"(More) was more of a public figure," ac-

#### Diocese honors patron

Rochester, England, and Rochester, N.Y., lie thousands of miles apart.

Yet the two cities have ties beyond their names — thanks in large part to the efforts of Bishop James E. Kearney.

During his tenure as bishop of Rochester (1937-66), Bishop Kearney oversaw the establishment of St. John Fisher College (1947) and St. John of Rochester Parish (1962). Both were named after the saint and bishop of Rochester, England, who in 1535, was executed for opposing Henry VIII's takeover of the church (see related article, this page).

And on June 9, 1961, Pope John XXIII, at Bishop Kearney's request, appointed St. John Fisher the patron saint of the American Diocese of Rochester.

Moreover, Bishop Kearney named St. Thomas More Parish (1954) after Cardinal Fisher's fellow martyr, St. Thomas More, former chancellor of England — with whom he shares a June 22 feast day.

In addition, a stone from Cardinal Fisher's former cathedral in England, St. Andrew's, was split and used in the construction of St. Andrew's Minor Seminary on Buffalo Road Rochester — site of the

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knowledgeable Father John Cavanaugh, a retired St. John Fisher College English professor who wrote a doctoral thesis about More, but who also wrote a pamphlet about Cardinal Fisher in 1985.

Indeed, Father Cavanaugh attended 1985 celebrations in Rome marking the 50th anniversary of the two saints' canonizations.

"It was all about More," the priest recalled. "They just seemed to have forgotten that it was an anniversary for two saints."

More was a lawyer, a judge, chancellor, a noted writer and wit, and a married man with children — all of which have helped keep him in the public mind, Father Cavanaugh explained.

Cardinal Fisher, on the other hand, was an austere, private man more inclined to praying and reading than socializing.

"Fisher just didn't have the gregariousness that More had," the priest continued. "He was, I think (what) we would call a solitary man."

Cardinal Fisher was known among scholars and theologians, however because of his work to develop and promote Cambridge University, his efforts to promote the study of Greek and Hebrew among priests, and his writings in defense of the church against Martin Luther, Father Cavanaugh explained.

Moreover, he was active in his diocese — unlike many other bishops of his time — visiting parishes and preaching regularly. And although it was one of the poorest and smallest dioceses in England, and one often used as just a stepping stone to higher appointment, he stayed there from his appointment in 1504 until 1535.

"He had the right concept — that when a bishop becomes a bishop of a par-

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