

We could spend a long time debating the life and death of this ‘troublesome’ man, putting it into the larger perspective of the Gregorian reform of the Church: of the perennial conflict between Pope and king; of the more immediate conflict of personalities; of the wounded pride and ambition of both Thomas and Henry; of the uncertainty of Thomas’s motives at the very end in a post which took even himself by surprise and a position so flattering to his own faults. But, in the end, we are left with a man, unpopular with many, including even his own monks, who chooses not to run away and is discovered after his death to have been clothed in the monastic garb after all – in a hair-shirt, at least, and, perhaps then, fully aware of his weaknesses. And perhaps that’s the challenge of it all; the witness that makes this man ‘troublesome’ to all of us. For the miracles that follow, for whatever reason, miraculous or not, trouble us with a flawed personality suddenly become a saint. This can either give hope for us all or further dread. It can challenge us to look at our own inconsistencies more closely and to amend or it can lead us to bolt the door more firmly against change, against the possibility, that is, of martyrdom. So we’ll leave the last words with T. S. Eliot, another flawed man, aware, though, of his need for grace:

*Forgive us O God, we acknowledge ourselves as type of the common man,
Of the man and woman who shut the door and sit by the fire;
Who fear the blessing of God, the loneliness of the night of
God, the surrender required, the deprivation inflicted;
Who fear the injustice of man less than the justice of God.*

*Lord have mercy upon us
Lord have mercy upon us
Lord have mercy upon us
Blessed Thomas, pray for us.*

(From *Murder in the Cathedral*: Chorus at the end)

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