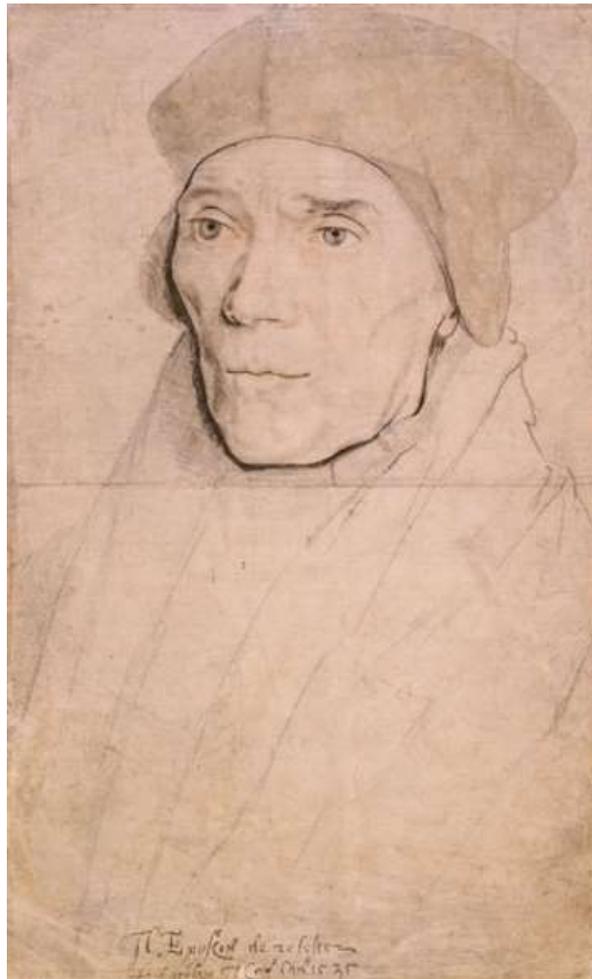


Art and reflections prepared by Dr Sophia Errey

SS. John Fisher and Thomas More 6th July

John Fisher was a priest and a noted humanist scholar who became Chancellor of Cambridge University. He was a personal tutor to the young Henry VI. However, when King Henry proposed to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, Fisher, then a Bishop, strongly opposed it, and refused to recognize the king as head of the Church. After a year in prison he was given a brief trial and beheaded on 22 June 1535. The masterly drawing by Hans Holbein the Younger, clearly reveals the austerity which his biography describes.



More was also a man of great learning and highly gifted as a statesman. At first attracted to the monastic life he married in 1505, and had four children with his wife Jane. In 1529 he was appointed Lord Chancellor, but was dismissed in 1532 after failing to support the king's claims to power over the Church. On 13th April 1534 both More and Fisher refused to take an oath which required allegiance to the king and his succession by Ann Boleyn and repudiated any "foreign authority" (ie, the Pope) and More was imprisoned until his execution on 6th July 1535.

In 1526 the German painter Hans Holbein had sought a letter of introduction from Desiderius Erasmus to help him find work in England. Erasmus and More were friends and correspondents, and thus Holbein came to paint More's whole family as a group portrait. The painting, which Roy Strong has called "arguably the greatest and most innovative work of (Holbein's) English period" was destroyed in 1752. However, early copies have survived, as has Holbein's preliminary drawing.



Holbein's 1527 portrait of Sir Thomas More at the height of his power gives a striking impression of his intensity and intelligence.



St Benedict of Nursia (c 480-c 543). 11th July

In his Introduction to his little book *The Way of St Benedict* (2020) Rowan Williams writes "For fifteen hundred years, the Rule of St Benedict has been one of the most influential texts in the culture of Western Europe...it has touched countless lives by the mere fact that it has shaped personalities who have in turn shaped their societies. The buildings that once housed communities living by the Rule still dominate many landscapes – not least in the heart of London, where Westminster Abbey stands alongside the great edifices that represent the authority of the law and the processes of government.....Benedictine life speaks to people of the extraordinary power of *stability* – not a static and frozen style of life, but a solid commitment to accompany one another in the search for a way to live honestly and constructively together in the presence of God."

Benedict was born into a wealthy Roman family in Nursia (modern day Norcia in Umbria, Italy). While studying in Rome he was repelled by the hedonistic life of the city, and became a hermit, living in rural isolation for several years. However, followers were attracted by his life and teaching, leading him to establish 12 monasteries, including that at Monte Cassino, where he wrote the Rule.



Master of Messkirch - Benedict as a Hermit. C 1530



St Benedict hands the Rule to St Maurus.
Frontispiece of a MS of the Rule, French, c 1125-1150

The still-flourishing Abbey of Monte Oliveto Maggiore in Tuscany, founded in 1313, has an interior courtyard (the "Great Cloister") with the walls lined with paintings of the life of the saint by Signorelli and Sodoma, executed between 1497 and 1505. While not as well-known as portable panel paintings which have ended up in major collections, these frescoes are masterpieces of the High Renaissance. One section shows the monks at a meal.

