

- 1 In 1155 Thomas à Becket was chosen by King Henry II to be Chancellor of England. He served the king faithfully, helping to run the country, especially as Henry spent much of his time on the Continent, governing the rest of his kingdom.
- 2 Seven years after Thomas became Chancellor, the king - wanting to have full control of the church - thought that he should appoint his good friend as Archbishop of Canterbury. Thomas resisted, saying that his priorities and loyalties would change, and he would have to be independent of the king. Yet Henry went ahead. Thomas - who was not then a priest - first had to be ordained to the priesthood before being made Archbishop of Canterbury.
- 3 As he said he would, Thomas became a different person on becoming Archbishop. He wrote that he had changed from being
*“a patron of play-actors
 and a follower of hounds,
 to being a shepherd of souls.”*
- 4 For eight years, Thomas and the king (well-renowned for his fierce temper) had many disagreements. Whilst in Normandy, the king became very angry and said:
*“Will no-one rid me
 of this troublesome priest?”*
 Although Henry probably did not intend that anything should happen, four knights left the king’s presence and sailed across the English Channel.
- 5 On this day in 1170, the four knights drew their swords as they approached the Archbishop in his own cathedral.
*“Willingly I die
 for Christ and his Church,”*
 he said, as they stabbed and killed him. The horrific murder was condemned throughout Europe, and Thomas was seen as a martyr and saint. Only three years after Thomas’ death, the Pope declared him to be a saint. King Henry II had to undergo public penance, even though it was probably not his intention that harm be done to the Archbishop.
- 6 For the next 400 years, the shrine of St Thomas in Canterbury Cathedral was one of Europe’s main centres of pilgrimage (until destroyed by King Henry VIII).
- 7 “Martyr” is the Greek word for “witness”, and we can think of bishops and many other good people in our own times who have been martyred.
- 8 *Let us pray:*
- Lord, inspire us
 to be credible witnesses of your love,
 and good shepherds
 towards those
 you have entrusted to our care.
 Amen.**

This is an excerpt from the page of this date in
'Praying Each Day of the Year',
a 3-volume book
by Nicholas Hutchinson, FSC.

For details:

<http://www.matthew-james.co.uk/>

Could make use of a search engine
to research this topic further.

This material is part of
the prayer and education website
of the De La Salle Brothers
in Great Britain:
www.prayingeachday.org