

## St. Thomas Beckett (1118-1170) Bishop and Martyr

The son of a cloth merchant, Thomas was born in London, England and received an excellent education. Intelligent, athletic, a gifted administrator, and extremely ambitious, Thomas soon drew attention. By the age of 24 he was the chief assistant to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the most important bishop in the country.

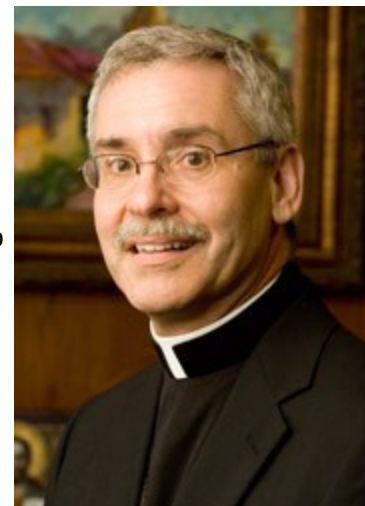
Seemingly on track for a church career when ordained a deacon in 1154, this changed when the archbishop recommended him to a position with the newly installed King Henry II. Thomas soon became Henry's chief advisor, or chancellor, as well as his best friend. At age 36, Thomas was now the second most powerful man in the kingdom, and was widely regarded as having turned his back on the Church in favor of the state.

With the death of the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162, Henry sought to weaken the independence of the Church and bring it under his control. He used his influence to have Thomas made the new archbishop. Since Thomas was only a deacon, this required that he be ordained a priest one day and archbishop the next.

However, Thomas underwent a conversion to Christ. Giving up his estates and other property, he took seriously his vows as a priest and bishop. He resigned as chancellor and came into direct conflict with the king over the independence of the Church. The once best friends had become determined foes.

Exiled for time in France, the Thomas returned to England in 1170. When Henry became critical of his allies who let the archbishop oppose him, four of this knights decided to assassinate Thomas. Entering Canterbury Cathedral at the beginning of Vespers on December 29, 1170, the four men drew their swords and hacked the archbishop to death. He was 52 years old.

The murder shocked all of Europe and caused Henry to do a public penance. Canonized only three years later, Thomas' tomb at Canterbury Cathedral became one of the most popular pilgrimage sites during the Middle Ages. During the Protestant Reformation his remains were destroyed by the orders of King Henry VIII. In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, T. S. Elliot's play *Murder in the Cathedral*, and the 1964 film *Becket* the saint is a central character. He is the inspiration and namesake of The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, dedicated to the protection of all religious expression. Recognized as a martyr and saint by both the Catholic and Anglican churches his memorial is celebrated on December 29. St. Thomas Becket, pray for us!



**Bishop Anthony Taylor**  
**Diocese of Little Rock**  
**Arkansas**

Anthony (Tony) Taylor was born on April 24, 1954, in Fort Worth, Texas. The eldest of seven children, his parents moved the family to Ponca City, Oklahoma, when he was six years old. Raised in a solid home environment that fostered his vocation. Tony attended Catholic schools before graduating from Ponca City High School in 1972. For the next two years he studied at the University of Oklahoma, until

he was accepted as a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. Earning a bachelor degree in history from St. Meinrad Seminary College in Indiana, he went on to attend the North American College in Rome. He was ordained a priest at the age of 26 on August 2, 1980, at his home parish of St. Mary in Ponca City. Having become proficient in Spanish, the newly ordained Fr. Tony initiated Hispanic ministry and outreach in the parishes in which he served in Oklahoma City, Hinton, Clinton and Sayre. He then studied at Fordham University in New York, earning a doctorate in biblical theology in 1989.

Returning to Oklahoma, Fr. Tony was named vicar for ministry for the Archdiocese. In this responsibility he oversaw the ongoing formation and education of both priests and permanent deacons, especially those newly ordained and those coming from other countries. He would hold this position for nearly twenty years.

In addition to being the vicar of ministry, in 1993 Fr. Tony was the founding pastor of St. Monica Parish in Edmond, where he served for ten years. Later he was appointed to direct the support of the Archdiocese to the parish of Santiago Atitlan in Guatemala, as well as heading the effort for the canonization of Fr. Stan Rother, and Oklahoma priest who was martyred there in 1981.

In April 2008, Fr. Tony was appointed by Pope Benedict XVI to be the bishop of the Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas. He was ordained bishop on June 5, 2008, in Little Rock at the age of 54. Bishop Taylor issued his first pastoral letter, on the subject of the human rights of immigrants, to the Diocese in November of that year. He is becoming well known for this energetic leadership and his openness to the people of the Diocese, which includes having a page on Face book.