

Achievement Course: Patriotism
Recommended Ages: 10-18 years of age
Approximate Completion Time Frame: 6-12 months



Saint Thomas More, pray for us!

Saint Thomas More was born in 1478 in London, England. Thomas' father provided him a solid Catholic education and at the age of 13, placed him in the home of the Archbishop of Canterbury's home for further training. Saint Thomas studied law at Oxford and after discerning his vocation, had a brilliant and successful career, married, and had 4 children. Saint Thomas eventually became the secretary and personal advisor to King Henry VIII, who appointed him as Lord Chancellor of England in 1529.

At the height of his career, Saint Thomas More resigned his position when King Henry broke with the Pope and declared himself Supreme Head of the Church of England. In 1534, Saint Thomas and his close friend, Bishop and now Saint John Fisher, were imprisoned in the Tower of London for refusing to render allegiance to the King as head of the Church. Saint Thomas More was convicted of treason 15 months later. While on trial, he told the court that he could not go against his conscience. He was beheaded on July 6, 1535. When he was on the scaffold, he told the crowd of spectators that he was dying, "the king's good servant, but God's first."

Objective: To understand the virtues of patriotism and piety as Catholic gentlemen.

1. Requirements (*These may be adapted or excluded to fit your country of residence*)
 - a. Read and discuss an essay on what Patriotism means to a Catholic with your troop Captain or father/male guardian. Two examples are provided at the end of this Achievement Course.
 - b. Learn and recite excerpts of the entire documents below.
 - i. Pledge of Allegiance
 - ii. Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America
 - iii. Declaration of Independence
 - c. Research the positions of candidates in a local, state, or national election.
 - i. What is each politician's stance on the rights of the unborn?
 - ii. What is each politician's stance on the definition of marriage?
 - d. Visit a Veteran's Affairs (VA) hospital with your troop or father/male guardian and speak with a veteran.
 - e. Visit a historic Civil War battlefield, State Park, or National Park.
 - f. Visit a local, state, or national monument or cemetery.
 - g. Organize a care package drive for active duty Catholic troops.
 - h. Write a letter of thanks to a Catholic Priest serving as an active duty Chaplain in a branch of the military.
 - i. March with your troop in an Independence Day parade.
 - j. Participate in a Walk for Life even with your troop or family.
 - k. Pray with your troop or family at an abortion clinic.
 - l. Learn the following rules of etiquette for both your state flag and the flag of the United States of America (or your country of residence's flag).
 - i. The rules for raising flags to full and half staff
 - ii. The rules for displaying flags at meetings or campouts
 - iii. How to fold and carry
 - m. Lead a flag ceremony for your troop.
 - n. Lead or participate in a flag retirement ceremony.
2. A Song for a Nation (Essay)

One of the great pleasures of riding a bicycle in a state as long-settled as Rhode Island is that, when you're not in the city, you often find yourself in the midst of a palimpsest of human life in its passage through the many years. There are the little "historical cemeteries," about a thousand of them, sometimes no more than a small family plot, protected by iron fences and dutifully tended. There are the miles of low stone walls running zigzag through the woods, marking what used to be fields and pastures. There are square pits in the earth, old root cellars, perhaps; and sometimes the walled embankments of a diverted stream, to provide power for a gristmill that no longer stands.

I wasn't born here, but I have grown fond of the place, with its geographical and historical bumps. I now can order a grinder at a diner or a cabinet at an ice cream stand, and can, for the voice of a Cyclops, turn a short a into a triphthong and swallow my *r*'s like any tattooed fisherman or real estate salesman around. I know where the fallen trestle is on the train bed that is now a bike path, and something in me is fond of that big broken tooth, though I'll admit that it might provide a rude surprise for the unwary.

I find it hard to love my country without first turning to the crazy coal heap in Pennsylvania where I was born, or to this bumptious county trying so very hard to be a real state. Yet I suspect that's all

right, after all. C. S. Lewis imagined heaven as an English countryside—why not? Surely there is some of heaven in that land, however difficult it may be to see sometimes, or to hear, or to touch. The old *pagani*, the "hillbillies," to translate the Roman word loosely, knew that love well, and clung to their old ways long after the Good News had been preached in the cities. I hope the Lord looked gently upon their blockheadedness, because just as to love one's father on earth is preparation for loving one's Father in heaven, so to love the land of one's mortality is preparation for loving the land of immortality.

That's why we *ought* to sing patriotic hymns. I don't mean songs that merely boast of the military bravery of Frenchmen or the cool wisdom of Italians, or the enlightenment of the sprouts of Brussels: "See where the meddling lawyer comes!" I mean *hymns*, songs that place love of country in the only light where it can really flourish and not grow wild and bitter, or wither away: in the light of the countenance of God.

Therefore my favorite anthem on Independence Day is the humble one that was once simply called "America":

*My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing:
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From every mountainside
Let freedom ring.*

The mortal part of my father, God bless him, now rests on a sunny hillside in my hometown; and how could I not love that place? When I was a child, I heard Mass there every year with all the paraders on Memorial Day, and now, beside his grave, as beside so many others, stands a small American flag, witness to his service.

But lest we suppose that our love is only to a concept—freedom, so little understood—the second stanza brings us to the little country bridge that spans earth and heaven:

*My native country, thee,
Land of the noble free,
Thy name I love
I love thy rocks and rills,
Thy woods and templed hills;
My heart with rapture thrills
Like that above.*

I doubt whether one person in a hundred could now understand those words. We sing—not of Mount Rushmore or the Mississippi, but of the small and the beloved, the running streams and the hills that are hushed like holy temples, and we can nearly say, with the saint, that whether in the body or out of the body, we are caught up to the heaven of heavens.

If we do stand for an idea, that idea is also a call, and one made by a man who climbed the hills of his own native land:

*Let music swell the breeze,
And ring from all the trees
Sweet freedom's song;
Let mortal tongues awake,
Let all that breathe partake,
Let rocks their silence break,
The sound prolong.*

So when the Pharisees demanded that Jesus rebuke his disciples for saying, "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord," Jesus replied, "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out" (Luke 19:38–40).

Do the rocks then break their silence, reverberating the song of freedom? Yes, because they proclaim the very bestower of freedom. The man who penned these lines, Samuel Francis Smith, saw his countrymen as exchanging one king for another, a king who had exercised unjust dominion over the American people for the true King whose dominion sets men free:

*Our fathers' God, to thee,
Author of liberty,
To thee we sing:
Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light;
Protect us by thy might,
Great God, our King.*

And to that, let every loving heart cry, Amen!

Anthony Esolen is Professor of English at Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island, and the author of The Ironies of Faith (ISI Books), The Politically Incorrect Guide to Western Civilization (Regnery), and Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child (ISI Books). He has also translated Tasso's Gerusalemme liberata (Johns Hopkins Press) and Dante's The Divine Comedy (Random House). He is a senior editor of Touchstone.

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3. Pilgrims Planted – The Patriot Loves His Land Because It Is a Shadow (Essay)

I'm not sure what our schoolchildren are taught about the Pilgrim Fathers these days. Probably not much. They may be taught that they sailed from England to escape persecution by the state church, and that they were generally inept folks who would all have died were it not for the assistance of a gentle Indian named Squanto, who showed them what maize was and how to fertilize the flinty New England soil with dead fish. For that, they gave the first Thanksgiving dinner, to Give Thanks, and invited the Indians, to whom they also gave thanks.

But the students surely are not taught what a pilgrim is, literally. The Latin *peregrinus* means “somebody who wanders across the fields,” and was adopted in the Middle Ages to refer to one who made the arduous trip overland—and finally over the Pyrenees—to the shrine of St. James at Compostela, in Galicia.

Essential Piety

Such journeys are of the essence of Christian piety. For the call of the pilgrim is older than the Middle Ages, older even than the New Testament. In a way, it is as old as creation, when the Word went forth from the Father, not to return in vain.

It begins, certainly, with our first parents. The Lord expelled the first sinners from the garden, when, as Milton says, “The world was all before them, where to choose their place of rest, and Providence their guide.”

Enoch walked with God, and then one evening was seen no more. Noah ventured upon the billowing seas in an “ark,” a box, and, as my colleague Patrick Reardon has written, that rare word is the same used to describe the little wicker basket wherein the baby Moses was placed upon the waters.

Abraham, without a Baedeker, by camel and on foot, took his weary way from Ur of the sophisticated Chaldees to the land the Lord would show him, a land he knew nothing of. The great Passover meal is eaten as if in haste, with one’s loins girt and staff in hand, ready for a journey. The commandments are placed in another Ark, and for generations that Ark resides in a tent, moving from place to place. Jesus goes before us to Galilee, then to his Father’s house, to prepare a dwelling for us there.

The Christian faith is a faith on the move, secure in the kingdom of God that is already among us, but awaiting the kingdom to come in its fullness. We know that our homes are not here; we are all like Abraham, our father in faith, strangers in a strange land.

Yet it is liberating, that knowledge that no farmland however rich, no hills however green, no city however just can claim our final allegiance as our home. It frees us to forgive the stumps and stones, the abandoned machines, the burnt-out tenements, the buckled roads, the commissioners on the take, the mosquitoes from the marsh, the swelter in August and the frozen mud in February.

We can be stable, steadfast—planted in one place. So were the monks who lived under Benedict’s rule. Because they were pilgrims, they knew that no one place here could satisfy the heart. So with a free conscience they took a vow of stability, and devoted their earthly attentions to one place, praying there, and clearing woods, draining swamps, tilling fields, and draping the hills with the vine.

With the same spirit of longing for home, and a similar care for their less than perfect new place of sojourning in a cold and harsh land, the Pilgrim Fathers stayed close to where they built their first village. Such a pilgrim is a patriot in the most perfect sense. He loves his land, and devotes himself to it, because it is a shadow of the *patria* he truly loves, and towards which he is always walking. The grace of the Father calms our hearts, and spurs us on, as the Father himself is ever in act, and ever at rest.

What is the converse of the pilgrim? The wanderer, seeking the peace that cannot be found on earth; godless, therefore strangely landless, making an idol of every city or every earthly delight he happens upon, but turning against it when it proves to disappoint.

Such wanderers are restless, yet fixed in a dreary stasis. They are always going here and there, to no end, as men inextricably lost in the windings of a labyrinth. “God help the man so wrapped in Error’s endless train,” says the poet Spenser.

True Valor

How to love our land of trouble by loving the Land of Rest and setting our hearts upon it? Let the virtue of patriotism be baptized and transformed by loyalty to Christ. John Bunyan loved his native England even when she saw fit to toss him in jail for his religious dissent.

Thence came the great *Pilgrim’s Progress*, wherein we read, in a good old muscular hymn, that the “true valor” of an English Christian, a valor that will not quail for wind or weather, is constancy in pilgrimage, steadfastness in being on the move towards the city of God:

*Hobgoblin, nor foul fiend
Can daunt his spirit:
He knows, he at the end
Shall life inherit.
Then fancies fly away,
He’ll fear not what men say,
He’ll labour night and day
To be a pilgrim.*

Pilgrims and patriots, a Happy Thanksgiving to you all.
— Anthony Esolen, *for the editors*

Anthony Esolen is Professor of English at Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island, and the author of The Ironies of Faith (ISI Books), The Politically Incorrect Guide to Western Civilization (Regnery), and Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child (ISI Books). He has also translated Tasso’s Gerusalemme liberata (Johns Hopkins Press) and Dante’s The Divine Comedy (Random House). He is a senior editor of Touchstone.

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