

Red Mass

Holy Rosary Cathedral

8 May 2018

Dear brother priests; members of the St. Thomas More Lawyers' Guild of the Archdiocese of Vancouver; esteemed Judges, attorneys, legal educators and student lawyers and their co-workers; dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

Once again this evening we are gathered in our Cathedral for our annual celebration of the traditional "Red Mass" to invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Counsellor (cf. Jn 14:26), upon all those engaged in the legal profession in our community.

Whether adverted to or not, our Christian life is ceaselessly inspired by the Spirit of Truth, sent from the Father by the Risen Lord himself, to guide us in the way of truth. The presence of this Spirit of God who entered into our lives at Baptism was strengthened in us at Confirmation when he poured his seven-fold gifts into our souls.

"Lead a Life Worth of the Calling"

It is necessary for every disciple to discern his or her own path of living the Gospel in the world, "that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts (cf. 1 Cor 12:7)."¹ As St. Paul writes in our First Reading: "I . . . beg

¹ Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 11.

you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love” (Eph 4:1-2).

Cardinal John Henry Newman liked to put it this way: we have each received a specific mission in the Church: “God has created me to do him some definite service,” Newman wrote. “He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another.”

Dear friends: for you, your calling is to serve the law in the administration of justice in all its complexities. As custodians and practitioners of the law, you have embraced a particular way to live out the vocation you received at Baptism and Confirmation.

Yours is not an easy task under the very best of circumstances – and today it is undoubtedly more challenging than ever. That’s why at this Mass we are praying with fervour to the Holy Spirit, asking that he kindle the gifts of wisdom, understanding, courage in all those involved in the practice of law and the administration of justice in our city, province and nation.

Apostolate of Influence

All of us, I suspect, like to think of ourselves as having a positive influence on others and on our world. We strive to make a difference by what we say and do, by the way we fulfill our responsibilities and offer leadership in the legal profession. As the Apostle Paul reminded us, each

of us is blessed with the gifts that the Spirit imparts. He calls us to employ these special gifts to influence others by our prayerfulness, by good example, by our wisdom, by our knowledge and by love for truth and justice.

Newman referred to this use of God's gifts as the "apostolate of personal influence." For this influence to be positive and effective it must have several characteristics, and I'll briefly mention three of them.

First, if our faith has any hope of influencing others, and it should, since living the Christian life is not merely a private affair, this faith has to be firmly rooted in the conviction that what we profess is true in an objective sense. Moreover, we must and that belief has consequences for behaviour and action, not just in our personal life, but for the world immediately around us. Faith is deeply personal but, if it is real, it reverberates in our profession. If it informs our minds as well as our hearts, how could it not influence what we think and do in the service of the law and justice?

The second characteristic of the "apostolate of personal influence" is this: if our hearts are to speak to the hearts of others, then there must be a distinguishing quality about our lives, an "undertone of truth," a transparency which, even without drawing attention to itself, draws others to the good. A life of integrity and virtue rooted in deep convictions about God's design for humanity and illumined by the love

of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom.5:5) bears witness to the Gospel, even when no words are spoken.

And third, the apostolate of personal influence is most effectively exercised only if we prayerfully discern the Lord's will in our lives and ask for guidance in saying the right thing at the right time to those whose minds and hearts we hope to influence.

Men and women involved in the law and the administration of justice can influence others and offer witness in many areas, but there is one of particular importance at the present moment. Here I am thinking about how you can influence your colleagues, the courts and public opinion to consider carefully the importance of maintaining freedom of religion and of conscience, which are increasingly threatened at home and abroad. In Canada, these threats do not entail violence, exile, and death as is the case in so many other parts of the world where religious persecution is rampant.

By contrast, in our country threats to freedom of religion and conscience are more subtle. They are embedded in proposed regulations, government policies, court decisions, accreditation procedures and so on. The role of government is not to determine what religious beliefs Canadians should hold. "A government that seeks to do that is nothing

short of totalitarian.”²

I urge you to strive to influence others so as to protect and defend religious freedom, not merely as a private right to believe and worship as one sees fit, but as the right of believers to assemble, to organize, and to express their beliefs through public ministries that serve the common good: actions that bring faith bear in a genuinely pluralistic public square, in the field of education, health care, and works of service.³

Gospel of the Beatitudes

When we turn to today’s Gospel of the Beatitudes, what light does it shed on the vocation of those called to the law?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explains with great simplicity what it means if we sincerely want to be true disciples and not phonies. The eight Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23) provides us with “that horizon towards which we are called and challenged to set out.”⁴ In his most recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete and Exsultate*, “Rejoice and Be Glad,” Pope Francis writes that “The Beatitudes are like a Christian’s identity card. So if anyone asks: ‘What must one do to be a good

² “The BIG Interview, Fr. Deacon Andrew Bennett,” by Andrew Ehrkamp (30 January 2018).

³ Cf. Archbishop William Lori, Homily, Red Mass (28 September 2017).

⁴ Francis, Homily, Santiago (16 January 2018).

Christian?', the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives."⁵

I urge you not to read the Gospels as mere, unattainable ideals or as applicable to our personal lives but not relevant for public affairs. No where does Jesus make any such distinction.⁶ Let's be clear; if we abandon these radical demands or silence them by indifference, we are abandoning the Lord himself, since these Beatitudes express who Jesus is.

Perhaps the one Beatitude that deserves being singled out at the Red Mass is this one: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness – for justice, for what is right – , for they will be filled" (Mt 5:6). "They shall be satisfied because they hunger and thirst for right relations with God, with themselves, with their brothers and sisters, and with the whole of creation."⁷

Jesus calls us to a justice that is not marred by ideologies, petty interests or manipulated in various ways. As the Holy Father writes in

⁵ Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 63.

⁶ Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, 2006), 59.

⁷ Benedict XVI, Message for the 2012 World Day of Peace, 4.

his Exhortation, “True justice comes about in people’s lives when they themselves are just in their decisions; it is expressed in their pursuit of justice for the poor and the weak.”⁸

Conclusion

As those entrusted with awesome responsibilities for ensuring justice in our legal system, you need the prayers of those for whom you labour – that’s all of us gathered here. And this evening we gladly assure you of those prayers: that your service of the law will be fruitful and fulfilling. May the Holy Spirit grant you the wisdom and guidance to see the world through God’s eyes as he has revealed himself and his supreme law in the person and message of Jesus Christ.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

⁸ Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 79.