

Red Mass

Holy Rosary Cathedral

12 September 2019

Dear brother priests, Deacons Richard and Tim, members of the St. Thomas More Lawyers' Guild; esteemed Judges, attorneys, paralegals educators and students of the law; dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

Originating centuries ago in Rome, Paris and London, the Red Mass has a rich tradition of invoking God's blessing on all those engaged in the administration of justice. This evening, we gather to celebrate this Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, praying that this same Spirit will come upon each one of us with renewed power. The "red" of the Red Mass refers not only to the red vestments worn by the clergy today but also the tongues of fire in the Upper Room where the Holy Spirit sent out the Apostles to proclaim the Good News to the whole world. And we call upon that Spirit to give light to the minds and courage to the wills of all those who serve the cause of justice and the common good here in the Lower Mainland.

Religious Faith in Professions and the Public Square

In many quarters of our professions and of public life it has become commonplace, perhaps even fashionable, to hold that religious beliefs should not influence our decision making. Convictions about the meaning of marriage, the right to life from conception to its natural end, respect for conscience, the identity of male and female, and the right of

religious institutions to maintain their beliefs while serving the good of society are dismissed as purely religious notions.

On the contrary, I would suggest to you that what we believe and hold most deeply in our intellects and conscience must influence our decision making – not because they are religious convictions but because they are true. Moreover, truth should not be disregarded simply because our religion embraces it. Nor should the law avoid or evade convictions based on truth simply because religious faith likewise proclaims it as such.¹

When society bases itself on moral relativism and when it considers every ethical principle or value to be negotiable, including every human being’s fundamental right to life, it is already, and in spite of its formal rules, on the path to totalitarianism. In the words of our Archdiocese’s secondary patron, St. John Paul II, “The root of modern totalitarianism is to be found in the denial of the transcendent dignity of the human person who, as the visible image of the invisible God, is therefore by his very nature the subject of rights which no one may violate – no individual, group, class, nation or state.”²

¹ Cf. Bishop David M. O’Connell, Homily at Red Mass (10 October 2011).

² St. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 99.

Whether or not a person accepts that the foundation of law is the truth about human nature and the created world matters a great deal. Truth matters. When we disregard transcendent truth, when we become reliant solely on an endless array of personal opinions or “my truths,” then there is no sure principle for guaranteeing just relations among people. “If one does not acknowledge transcendent truth, then the force of power takes over, and each person tends to make full use of the means at his disposal in order to impose his own interests or his own opinion, with no regard for the rights of others.”³

Again to cite St. John Paul II in an address he gave to the United Nations General Assembly:

Detached from the truth about the human person, freedom deteriorates into license in the lives of individuals, and, in political life, it becomes the caprice of the most powerful and the arrogance of power. Far from being a limitation upon freedom or a threat to it, reference to the truth about the human person – a truth universally knowable through the moral law written on the hearts of all – is, in fact, the guarantor of freedom’s future.⁴

³ St. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 99.

⁴ St. John Paul II, Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations (5 October 1995).

The Holy Spirit: Advocate and Spirit of Truth

As we heard proclaimed in the Gospel, at the Last Supper Jesus promised that he would send the Advocate from the Father (cf. Jn 15:26). The Greek word for Advocate, *Paraclete*, can also be translated as Counsellor, Helper and Comforter. Literally it means “one called to be alongside of” to aid, exhort and encourage.

In legal settings of the ancient world, a paraclete referred to an attorney making a defence in court on behalf of someone accused. Thus, the Holy Spirit as “Paraclete” or Advocate is given to us to stand beside us in support as we endure the trials of this world and to rebut the accusations of the “Accuser,” that is, the devil.

All lawyers – both defenders and prosecutors – and judges should feel the need to invoke the help and encouragement of the Holy Spirit as they carry out their duties as officers of the court. After all, you are counsellors, advocates, helpers and comforters as we, the unschooled in the law, navigate our way through the legal system.⁵

⁵ Cf. Archbishop Thomas Wenski, Homily at Red Mass (4 October 2018).

Because we live at a time when so often the truth is falsified, and we are almost overwhelmed by a whirlwind of fleeting information,⁶ it is more necessary than ever that we have recourse to the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth” (Jn 15:26) to guide us in the administration of justice. I do not think it is too high an aspiration to seek to be “mouthpieces of the truth”; that is to let the truth speak through us who have been purified by obedience to the truth.⁷

“Lead a Life Worth of the Calling”

In writing to the Christians at Ephesus, St. Paul says I “beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Eph 4:1). The first point he makes is that we have been called to lead a noble life because we have been baptized. We have been buried with Christ in the waters of Baptism so that we might live a new life with him. All other calls in our life are rooted in this identity of having been clothed in Christ, including the call to be a servant of the rule of law.

Among other commands the Apostle tells us that we are to live out our call – and here we can be specific and say “in service of the law” – “with all humility” (Eph 4:2). The Incarnation of the eternal Son of God is the supreme demonstration of humility: his accepting the form of a servant when he became man and was obedient unto death, even death

⁶ Francis, Address to the National Association of Magistrates (9 February 2019).

⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (6 October 2006).

on the Cross (cf. Phil 2:6-8). As followers of Jesus, we must likewise be humble.

This requires that we not think boastfully of ourselves, and that we keep things in proportion. The opposite of humility is pride, the root of all sin, which shows itself in arrogance, in claiming power, making a good impression on others. Pride seeks to please oneself, and likes being accepted and praised by others.

On the other hand, a humble Christian is sincere and realistic. She or he lives in the truth. Such humility brings with it enormous power, because a humble person is free to oppose a prevailing opinion and conventional wisdom.

Conclusion

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Spirit we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in his consolation. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB

Archbishop of Vancouver