

Red Mass

Holy Rosary Cathedral

22 September 2011

Dear brother priests, dear friends in Christ:

Introduction

Today marks an historical occasion in the life of the Church in Vancouver. Because of the inspiration of Warren Smith who two years ago proposed to me the idea, and because of the hard work of all the other members of the organizing committee, we are celebrating in our Cathedral the first annual Red Mass for lawyers, members of the judiciary and law students. In doing this, we are associating ourselves with a venerable tradition that goes back nearly 800 years to the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, and it remains alive in countless nations today. This evening we are honouring the high calling of those who recognize that human law is founded upon the divine Law and who conscientiously and with integrity mediate the application of this law. By offering this Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, we are invoking on you an outpouring of “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord” (Is 11:2), so that your endeavours will bear fruit for the Kingdom of God.

In a word, you are being reminded that your particular path of holiness passes by way of your profession. This is a primary place where you live the vocation you received in Baptism to walk in the newness of life in Christ (cf. Rom 6:4). For you, practising and

administering the law must express your love of God and your hunger and thirst for righteousness (cf. Mt 5:6).

Faith “calls for a consistent life commitment.”¹ It is a decision involving our whole existence. There can be no divorce between our “spiritual” life which encompasses the interior sphere and our professional and public life. Our life is a seamless garment, a whole cloth. To respond authentically to our call to discipleship, it is necessary to see our daily, professional duties as precisely those activities through which we fulfil God’s will and serve him – or not.

Administrators of Justice

As men and women engaged in the legal profession, yours is an extraordinarily noble vocation, for you share more directly than most of us in seeing to it that the divine attribute of justice is embodied in civil life. You are on the front line in expressing the Church’s concern “for a legal order imbued with the spirit and values of the Gospel.”²

But what is God’s understanding of justice?

In the Old Testament, the justice God asked of Israel did not

¹ Blessed John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* 89.

² Blessed John Paul II, Address to the International Academy of Trial Lawyers (22 September 1989).

merely mean to give to each what is due to him, what each person has a strict right to demand because he or she is a human being and has rights provable from reason or written into law. No, justice entailed a whole web of human relationships that stemmed from Israel's Covenant with God. The chosen people were to father orphans, welcome strangers, love sojourners and feed the hungry, not because they deserved it but because that was the way *God* had acted with *them*, his people.

Likewise, this is what Jesus taught. Justice cannot be reduced to the giving to another what they deserve, or ensuring that happens. There is more: as believers, we are compelled to see to it that they are treated as God wants them treated.

Undoubtedly, this is a tall order and perhaps far removed from the everyday practice of law and administration of justice. Indeed, we commonly invoke the blindfolded Roman goddess of *Justitia* whose scales are not to be tipped by arbitrariness, nor weighted in favour of the rich and powerful.³ And this a great treasure to be jealously preserved.

Nonetheless, despite your love for human law and your desire to serve it honourably, you cannot limit your life – we cannot limit social life – to living by this law: “your life has to leap beyond the law. . . ; the

³ Cf. Walter J. Burghardt, *Tell the Next Generation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 122-124; cf. Walter J. Burghardt, *To Christ I Look* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 167.

love of law should lead to the law of love.”⁴

⁴ Walter J. Burghardt, *Tell the Next Generation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 124, 125.

For a follower of Jesus, human law of itself cannot save you. Only being a “friend of God” (cf. Jn 15:15), having the “mind of Christ” (cf. Phil 2:5) can do that. Moreover, in our country, although human law and the rule of law are of the utmost importance, they cannot bring about by themselves a civilization of love or a culture of life. “The law of the land is no substitute for the Sermon on the Mount.”⁵ On that Mount, the New Moses, Jesus Christ, brings down not new laws but new blessings. He beatified the poor and the hungry of body and soul, the gentle and the sorrowing, the pure and the merciful, the victims of persecution, calumny and other abuse. He goes to the heart of all law, human and divine, by suggesting the kinds of persons we must be, the virtues we must exemplify, if we are to live well together.⁶

Even learned and skilled practitioners need that something “more”; those whom you serve need compassion, understanding, mercy and love. “For your salvation and theirs, give them yourselves. Act toward them

⁵ Walter J. Burghardt, *Tell the Next Generation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 125.

⁶ Cf. Anthony Fisher, Homily for the Red Mass, Sydney (2 Feb 2004).

as God has acted toward you.”⁷

Lawyer Saints

But can you do this? Can lawyers be saints? Popular mythology sees this as a contradiction. People love telling lawyer jokes and commonly place them in hell. Yet the history of sanctity in the Church contains dozens of examples of lawyer-saints: from Cyprian (+258), Ambrose (+397), Jerome (+430) to Thomas à Becket (+1170), Francis de Sales (+1622), Alphonsus Ligouri (+1787) and, above all, Thomas More (+1535). In fact, after religious and clerical vocations, the law has been the most common calling amongst the saints.

Allow me to say just a few words about St. Thomas More, whom I earnestly hope you will take as your patron if you decide to form a Lawyers’ Guild – which I earnestly pray you will do. What would such a Guild be and do? I envisage it as an association of Catholic lawyers and members of the judiciary which would, by its very existence, bear witness to the fact that there is no contradiction between the Catholic faith and the law profession and would help its members to integrate their spiritual and professional lives. As well as sponsoring the annual

⁷ Walter J. Burghardt, *Tell the Next Generation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 126.

Red Mass, it could also provide an opportunity for members to socialize and network with their colleagues and support one another in facing the challenges

I believe that now is the time to establish such a Guild in Vancouver. Such guilds already exist in the other major cities in Canada and the United States. You could choose for your patron no greater model than St. Thomas More: lawyer, judge, statesman, scholar, husband, father, martyr, saint. He was, as his friend Erasmus once described him and since made popular in the title of a movie classic, “a man for all seasons.”

Thomas More is admired by believers and non-believers alike for following his conscience, even at the cost of displeasing the King whose “good servant” he was. He chose “to serve not power but the supreme ideal of justice.”⁸ Despite the pressures to which he was subjected, he embodied the words of Jesus we heard in the Gospel: “Servants are not greater than their master” (Jn 15:20). Like his Lord, he never compromised his calling or his conscience, which the Fathers at the Second Vatican Council referred to as “the most intimate centre and

⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio* Declaring St. Thomas More Patron of Statesmen and Politicians (31 October 2000), 4.

sanctuary of a person, in which he or she is alone with God, whose voice echoes within them.”⁹

⁹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 16.

In those difficult times More confronted the perennial question of the relationship between what is owed to Caesar and what is owed to God.¹⁰ At his trial, he made an impassioned defence of his own convictions on the indissolubility of marriage, the respect due to the juridical patrimony of Christian civilization, and the freedom of the Church in her relations with the State.¹¹ But, in the end, the one-time Chancellor of the Realm paid for his unfailing moral integrity by dying a martyr's death in the Tower of London: "I die the King's good servant but God's servant first," he said. Thomas More remains for all of us, but especially for us gathered here this evening "an extraordinary example of freedom and of fidelity to the law of conscience in the face of morally untenable, albeit authoritative, demands."¹²

Conclusion

As we continue our Eucharist this evening, let us pray that all those who service justice will pursue their profession conscious of their need for divine grace and guidance, for enlightenment, wisdom and courage in carrying out the duties required of them. Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may these gifts of the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit

¹⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, Address at Westminster Hall, London (17 September 2010).

¹¹ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio* Declaring St. Thomas More Patron of Statesmen and Politicians (31 October 2000), 3.

¹² John Paul II, Address for the Jubilee of Government Leaders, Members of Parliament and Politicians (5 November 2000), 3.

of truth who comes from the Father” (Jn 15:26) be yours in abundance.
Amen.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver