

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
Homily – Red Mass, Diocese of Phoenix
(24.I.12)



Allow me to begin with a word of gratitude to Bishop Olmsted for his gracious invitation to preach at this annual Red Mass. The occasion is propitious, because the Catholic Church celebrates today the memorial of a saint who was a doctor of the Church. He suffered a great deal because of the challenges of living in the shadow of the Protestant Reformation. It is significant to speak to you at this juncture in our history when so many values are being examined. Personally, I have just returned from the visit to the Threshold of the Apostles where the Successor of the St. Peter reminded the Bishops of Region IV of our Country about the fundamental freedom of religion and conscience enshrined in our Constitution.

The word of God just proclaimed challenges us to accept our responsibility for others, to protect our rights, and to invoke God's blessing upon all of those who serve in the judicial system of this great state.

If we look at St. Francis de Sales, that Bishop of Geneva who toiled without tiring at the service of his people, we see a man who was never permitted to visit the seat of his diocese, because he was threatened with death. However, he was never bitter. He saw that his mission was the privilege to preach the inscrutable riches of Christ and to bring light to all. The gentleness for which he was known came from a great hope in God. We all know that the period of the Reformation was a time of excesses on all sides, but certain figures emerge whose holiness continues to inspire men and women today.

He always looked for the grace of the moment and the opportunity to grow in his love of Almighty God and humanity. How often do we see frustrations, reverses, and disappointments as opportunities to grow? How often do we look beyond the immediate to appreciate the potential, now cloudy, but perhaps later clearer?

Certainly, we live in a time of world-wide economic challenge. When jobs grow scarce, savings become compromised, markets dry up, and personal income is diminished, we are forced to determine what is a priority, what can I do without, and how do I best prepare for the future. Sometimes as individuals and as a society we make good

decisions. Other times we fail. In every instance, however, we should be able to recognize what is important and what values will not be sacrificed.

We hear the call of God to Cain after he has killed his brother Abel. Cain avoids a direct response, but rather poses a question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" In a literal sense, it remains unanswered, but very clearly the response is affirmative. From the beginning Almighty God reminds us that we are responsible for our brothers and sisters. We do not live in a vacuum. The person with nothing in Africa is my responsibility. So also the victim of injustice is my responsibility and I must do what I can to remedy the injustices of our world.

Last Thursday the Holy Father recalled the consensus about the nature of reality and the moral good and the conditions for human flourishing at the heart of every culture. "In America, that consensus, as enshrined in your nation's founding documents, was grounded in a worldview shaped not only by faith but a commitment to certain ethical principles deriving from nature and nature's God."¹ We all recognize how much that consensus has eroded, but at least the community of faith is obliged to foster a culture of truth and to encourage all men and women to cultivate the highest moral principles.

Again Pope Benedict XVI was very clear. "The Church's witness... is of its nature public: she seeks to convince by proposing rational arguments in the public square. The legitimate separation of Church and State cannot be taken to mean that the Church must be silent on certain issues, nor that the State may choose not to engage, or be engaged by, the voices of committed believers in determining the values which will shape the future of the nation."²

It is certainly a moment of pride to hear the Holy Father extol the virtues of our fundamental document, but also represents a challenge to assure that we retain that fundamental freedom of religion enshrined in the First Amendment. Few would question that it is in jeopardy. Many openly reduce that fundamental right to a mere freedom of worship. That is not what the Constitution recognizes. It is not enough.

I am reminded of Blessed Pope John Paul's statement in the Presidential Palace of Paraguay where he addressed the members of the Diplomatic Corps in the presence of Alfredo Stroessner: "No se puede arrinconar a la Iglesia en sus templos, como no se puede arrinconar a Dios en la conciencia de los hombres."³ (the Church cannot be corralled in her buildings, just as God cannot be cornered in the human conscience).

It is our responsibility of the pastoral care for others that dictates an annual celebration for those engaged in the legal profession. While it offers a moment to present a message, it is also an occasion to express sincere pastoral solicitude for all of those who like the allegorical figure of justice stand blindfolded and hold the scales of equality, law,

¹ Benedict XVI, Address to Bishops of Region IV, 19.I.12.

² *Ibid.*

³ Blessed John Paul II to Government and Diplomatic Corps, 16.V.88.

and service to their fellow citizens. How difficult to be impartial! What a challenge to serve the law and to ensure that the laws made respect justice and human dignity! What courage it takes to recognize the distinction between legal and moral!

History is full of examples of temporizing justice. Even the highest systems are not immune. We need only recall the capital punishment of Thomas More and John Fisher or the Dred Scott decision to name a few. “Justice is radically intolerant of injustice; justice seeks out injustice to destroy it. To emphasize security at the expense of eradicating injustice creates a fool’s paradise”⁴ The Romans put it more succinctly : “Justitia non novit patrem nec matrem; solum veritatem spectat justitia.” Justice knows neither father nor mother; justice looks to the truth alone.

Rest assured that we are here primarily to pray with you and for you as you execute the daunting task assigned to you at various levels. We beg a blessing for all of you and for all of those who assist you in this important ministry. We invoke the only Just One so that He might inspire all that you do. We recognize “that those who involve themselves with human law are doing God’s work. You are called to be involved with the same matters with which the Lord God is involved in relationship with His creation.”⁵

Returning from the visit to the Successor of Peter and his chief collaborators, my first stop was the annual Mass for Life and the March for life in Washington. It is always an uplifting moment to see so many young people anxious to defend a fundamental right. My second stop is here in Phoenix to pray with you and join Bishop Olmsted in invoking blessings upon your demanding and vital responsibilities. Two events related to each other. Both evidence the service of the Church to authentic justice.

I am reminded of my first year as a seminarian in Rome. An important 19th Century Justice Department building was closed because it was unsafe. It seemed to be sinking into the ground. Yet the Colosseum, Pantheon, and the ruins of the Roman Forum were all still standing and could be visited. It was a good reminder that not everything contemporary is good and that stable foundations are essential.

Francis de Sales teaches us the same thing. We still read his works to develop our spiritual life. I admire his courage and hope to imitate his example of pastoral solicitude in my ministry as the Archbishop for the Military Services. All of us can be encouraged and strengthened by his attitude in the face of hardships and adversity. All of us to do well to pause and beg the Author of Justice who has placed the law in each human heart to grant us the grace to be effective ministers of His gifts.

⁴ Most Reverend Robert J. Dwyer, at Red Mass, 1957.

⁵ Most Reverend Daniel Pilarczyk, Red Mass, 1988.