

**Homily – Red Mass  
Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption  
Saginaw, Michigan  
October 24, 2019**

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Good evening everyone! Welcome to all of you to this Red Mass. I am glad you are all here. As you have heard, the Red Mass has a very rich tradition of invoking God's blessing on judges, lawyers, professors of law, governmental officials and all people involved in the administration of justice. This Mass has a long tradition here in this diocese as well – 33 years, and of course continues here today.

As we gather to celebrate the Red Mass, you will notice that we are celebrating the Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, praying that the Holy Spirit will come upon each one of us with renewed power, praying that the Holy Spirit will come upon each one of you involved in some aspect in the administration of the law and public service.

The “red,” of the Red Mass, not only refers to the red vestments worn by me today but also the tongues of fire in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. The “red” thus represents the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the birthday of the Church, the feast of the Holy Spirit. The Church was about to be born, a Church called to energize the world until the end of time, participating in bringing about peace and justice, God's peace and justice in our time.

God's peace and justice comes about when each of us becomes animated by this Holy Spirit. You and I, and all those involved in the administration of justice, are called to welcome the influence of the Holy Spirit more robustly in our lives, not only to strengthen and encourage us in the challenges of professional life but also to help us serve the cause of truth, freedom, and the common good. It is no small thing that we pray for. We should constantly seek a new outpouring of the Spirit in our lives.

Also important to note is that the Holy Spirit is not given to us merely as our private possession. Though the faith that we share is deeply personal, it must never be seen as merely private. Thus, the Spirit, the Advocate whom Jesus promised to send, is indeed imparted to us, just as the Spirit was given to the Apostles on that first Pentecost. Because, like them, we too are being sent forth into the world to bear courageous witness to the Good News, the Gospel of Life and Salvation.

But how, then, do we bear witness to the Christian faith? People would say that it is easy for me because it is my “job”. It is what I have been ordained to do. But are not all of the baptized called to give witness to the Gospel by word and deed, in the midst of their daily life and work?

How do you bear witness to your faith amid the duties of public life? Amid the give and take of litigation and tragic criminal cases? Amid the technicalities of corporate law, the tax code, wills and estates? Amid the rigors of academic life – teaching, researching, writing, etc.?

How indeed do you bear witness amid the competing views and values that absorb many of your waking hours? Will you stand before your colleagues and your culture and preach like the Apostle Peter or St. Paul? I daresay that most of us simply won’t do that. Perhaps it is too risky! Or we are too afraid.

But yet, if we live in a country founded on Judeo-Christian values, proclaiming the Gospel is part of the fabric of who we are as a nation. This is undeniable in spite of the fact that many in our culture seek to deny it. As these Christian values continue to be torn down by secularism and humanism and relativism, among other things, the very fabric of who God has created us to be is eroding day by day. We can become very discouraged. We can become resigned to giving up the fight for truth and justice and mercy.

I don’t know if you have read or listened to the speech given by Attorney General William Barr to the Law School and the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame earlier this month. If not, I encourage you to do so. He said,

*“The social order must flow up from the people themselves – freely obeying the dictates of inwardly-possessed and commonly-shared moral values. And to control willful human beings, with an infinite capacity to rationalize, those moral values must rest on authority independent of men’s will – they must flow from a transcendent Supreme Being.”*

He asks the question: *How does religion promote the moral discipline and virtue needed to support free government?* And then says, *“First, it gives us the right rules to live by. The Founding generation were Christians. They believed that the Judeo-Christian moral system corresponds to the true nature of man. Those moral precepts start with the two great commandments – to Love God with your whole heart, soul, and mind; and to Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself.*

*But they also include the guidance of natural law – a real, transcendent moral order which flows from God’s eternal law – the divine wisdom by which the whole of creation is ordered. The eternal law is impressed upon, and reflected in, all created things.*

*From the nature of things we can, through reason, experience, discern standards of right and wrong that exist independent of human will.”*

But as we all know, the modern secularists, the progressives, and so many in our culture today reject this idea of morality as nonsense, as something imposed by a religion that has no value for them. But religion helps promote moral discipline within society. We are fallen human beings, affected by sin. Man doesn’t automatically conform to moral rules even when we know they are good for us.

*As AG Barr put it, “Religion helps teach, train, and habituate people to want what is good. It does not do this primarily by formal laws – that is, through coercion. It does this through moral education and by informing society’s informal rules – its customs and traditions which reflect the wisdom and experience of the ages. In other words, religion helps frame moral culture within society that instills and reinforces moral discipline.”*

As I mentioned, the growing rise of secularism and the doctrine of moral relativism has caused a continuing erosion of our traditional Judeo-Christian moral system and a comprehensive effort to drive it from the public square. This isn’t happening by chance or misfortune. According to Barr, it is systematically taking place in our culture today by the progressive secularists. The law is also being used as a weapon to break down traditional moral values and to establish moral relativism as a new orthodoxy, through legislation but more frequently through judicial interpretation.

What can we do? How can we even attempt to roll back the dramatic moral changes which are taking place in our society today? I suggest this:

As people of faith, our lives must remain grounded in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is he who leads us all to truth. The moral values of the Gospel, these Judeo-Christian values that have made this country great, must be sought and grounded in our own personal private lives. Only by transforming ourselves can we transform the world beyond ourselves. Only personal conversion can lead to the conversion of our society.

This is challenging work. It is hard to resist the constant seductions of our contemporary society. This is why we need mercy and grace, prayer and penance, and the help of our faith communities.

AG Barr also gave some advice to lawyers, saying that they should be particularly active in the struggle that is being waged against religion on the legal plane.

*“We must be vigilant to resist efforts by the forces of secularization to drive religious viewpoints from the public square and to impinge upon the free exercise of our faith.”*

The readings for this Mass give us great encouragement. St. Paul encourages us today: *“Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”* [Philippians 4:6-7]

The promised Spirit – Our Advocate – has been promised and is among us. You know what an advocate is because you too, are often advocates for others. *“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you.”* [John 14:26]

The Spirit, the Advocate comes gently. The Spirit is not felt as a burden, for the Spirit is light. In the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *“The Spirit comes to enlighten the mind first of the one who receives him, and then, through him, the minds of others as well.”*

So many of us frequently pray the Lord’s Prayer. We pray: *Thy kingdom come.* We ask that the kingdom of God may appear to us. We are praying that our kingdom, which has been promised to us by God, may come, the kingdom that was acquired by the blood and passion of Christ. In the words of St. Cyprian, *“Christ himself is the kingdom of God, for whose coming we daily ask. For since he himself is our resurrection, since in him we rise again, so also the kingdom of God may be understood to be himself, since it is in him that we shall reign. We do well to ask for the coming of the kingdom of God – that is, the heavenly kingdom – for there is also an earthly kingdom, and he who has already renounced this world is greater than any of its honors or powers.”*

*We also add: Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. This is not that God should do what he wills, but so that we may be able to do what God wills, on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Who could resist God in such a way as to prevent him from doing what he wills? But since the devil hinders us from obeying, by thought and by deed, God's will in all things, we pray and ask that God's will may be done in us. For this to happen, we need God's good will – that is, his help and protection, since no one is strong in and of himself but is kept safe by the grace and mercy of God.*

Therefore, we pray and ask the Holy Spirit to come, come to be our protector and guide; to be our strength and our joy; to be our source of hope and healing, of peace and justice – so that His will can be done through our work and ministry.

The Holy Spirit, in the Gospel, is often referred to as “the spirit of truth.” We pray today that He will lead us to all truth – the truth of who He is, the truth of who we are as created in his image and likeness – the truth of who we are called to be as a people and a nation.

As we celebrate this Red Mass, may these beautiful blessings of the Holy Spirit be yours today and everyday as you carry out your vocation of building a civilization of truth and love! Come Holy Spirit!