

[Filed with 1 Nov 1953  
speech re St Thomas More]

Commencement -  
JMJ

Georgetown Law Graduation  
May 29, 1977, Wash DC

To simplify the  
task, —

(Conscience)

What does one say to young lawyers, just graduated, that they might remember the next day, maybe even the next year?

I give you <sup>only</sup> three words <sup>to remember:</sup> compassion, competence and integrity.

I will speak briefly on the first two, and at length on the third, *as exemplified in the life of a great lawyer and good*

First, compassion. What does this word, which means 'to suffer with', have to do with lawyers? Lawyers, more than any other professional group in our society, are committed to justice. Justice, right and law are practically the same word in most latin languages. Despite the widespread development of law, the new consciousness worldwide concerning human rights, the constant appeals to justice, the world today is full of people who suffer injustice. In some countries this means torture and summary execution, imprisonment without charge or habeas corpus, restriction of movement, expression or publication, and a whole variety of other deprivations. In our own country, ~~In our own country~~, the right to life liberty and the pursuit of happiness is abridged in many ways, often depending upon one's color, <sup>age,</sup> sex, economic status or other conditions. When I say that all lawyers should first of all be compassionate, I mean that no one should suffer injustice, here or elsewhere, without your suffering, without your automatic concern, and where possible, your effort to relieve the injustice. In all ~~the~~ variety of things that you will do as lawyers, constantly ask yourself: what has this to do with justice? That is your real calling, your real and omnipresent task: to defend and establish justice, whatever the cost. That is the meaning of being compassionate as a lawyer. You cannot be a good lawyer without compassion. You

You may make a lot of money, you may become famous, but if you are not compassionate in the matter of justice and injustice, you will be a failure as a lawyer.

Secondly, competence. The worst that one could say of you is that today marks the end of your study of the law. The law is a jealous mistress; she demands constant attention. You can learn, and will learn much from experience in practicing the law. Real competence in the law, <sup>however</sup> is the fruit of constant reading in the law. I once was dining in Justice Frankfurter's Supreme Court chambers with a brilliant young lawyer friend of mine. In the course of our discussion during lunch, Justice Frankfurter constantly rose to pick a well marked book from his shelves, and to underline a point of law with an apposite quotation. Each time as he sat down again, he would query my friend: "Have you read that book, John?" As <sup>John</sup> he had to say for the twelfth time that he had not read the book, Justice Frankfurter said: "My friend, <sup>on graduation</sup> you gave promise of being a great lawyer. If you aren't reading books like these, forget it!" Just as people entrust the welfare of their souls to me, and their health to a physician, people will entrust to you the vindication of that which is most precious to them: their rights. In the face of such trust, it <sup>would be</sup> ~~is~~ a devastating betrayal to fail because of incompetence.

One more word about compassion and competence. Compassion is a cruel hoax without being joined with competence, and competence alone is sterile in a lawyer's life without compassion. You need, the world needs, both competence and compassion, but neither alone.

And now to integrity. The history of the early seventies in Washington is a story of competence without integrity.<sup>^</sup> The result, as you well know, was disaster, both personal and national. The real test of integrity is not just what we are personally willing to live for, but ultimately, what we are willing to die for. I give you now the life of a man who was willing to live and die for integrity, not just as a man, but professionally as a lawyer. In the doing he became the prototype of a great lawyer, as well as a great man, and indeed, a saint who can become your patron if you wish.

While he lived some four hundred years ago, there is a contemporaneity to his life and his legal career that make~~s~~ is highly relevant today. His name was Thomas More. Robert Bolt has aptly called him 'a man for all seasons.'

*"Blind Ambition"*  
 \* Read John Dean's book, and see the undoing of a bright young lawyer who admittedly compromised his integrity, proving the truth of Marlow's words: "What a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive"

I do not pray today that each of you will have as distinguished a career as a lawyer as did Thomas More, but who knows? There are still laurels to be won in the world of law, letters, diplomacy and government. I do pray that each one of you may share in your personal and professional lives the deep integrity, compassion and competence that characterized his life. To settle for anything less would be unworthy of your calling which you share today with Thomas More. You probably will not be asked to share his death, but his life, <sup>you,</sup> ~~that you~~ should ~~hunger for as~~ <sup>may you be</sup> ~~you~~ hunger for justice, <sup>today as</sup> ~~and~~ begin your professional career.