

(Homily delivered by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the Law School Red Mass, Sacred Heart Church, Notre Dame, Indiana, Sunday, October 1, 1978)

I am especially happy to be with you today, to celebrate with you this Red Mass, in which we invoke the power, the wisdom, the grace of the Holy Spirit upon each of you and your profession of law. You have read in the invitation how this Red Mass dates back to one of the first schools of law at Bologna, that predated the first true university in Paris founded in 1205.

The inauguration of the highest Church court, the Roman Rota, continued this tradition when founded in 1243. Five years later, one of the most beautiful churches in all of Europe, the Parisian Sainte Chapelle, was built by Louis IX on the Ile de France for the celebration of this Red Mass of the Holy Spirit to inaugurate the law court term. Early in the next century, the Red Mass spread to England when it was celebrated from 1307 until this day in Westminster Cathedral and Abbey for the judges of the King's Bench before Michaelmas Term at September's end. So the ancient tradition continues today for the University of Notre Dame's Law School and the Thomas J. <sup>and Alberta</sup> White Center. Welcome. Receive the Holy Spirit. Veni Sancte Spiritus -- Holy Spirit come upon us.

The Gospel for today's Mass is a shocker -- as are many Gospels if we read them carefully. Jesus is addressing the chief priests and the elders of the people. And He gives them a case.

The father in the story asks his two sons to go to work in his vineyard. As lawyers you all have received this call to serve justice,

especially where it is ill served and might be better served by one seized by a passion for justice. The first son glibly says he is on his way, but he really never starts. He professes, but he does not practice. He is an also-ran who does not run.

At least the second son is honest. He does not glibly accept the task; he is no idealist; he does not profess to serve. He simply says, "No, I will not." But then, he had second thoughts. The Gospel indicates a conversion. He regretted his unwillingness to serve. He then went and did what was expected of him.

What is the point of the story? Herein lies the shock. Jesus was speaking to those who professed to uphold the Torah, the law. They were the chief priests and the elders, but they were performing badly. Justice and the compassion mentioned by Paul in the second reading was hardly their compelling passion. They made a mockery of the law, dividing its purity into impure minutiae, legal skullduggery, nit-picking insensitivities, self-serving escape clauses, anything but justice for the poor and oppressed, surely profit for themselves and the powerful.

Conscious of their public profession and obvious commitment to the Torah, to justice, Jesus asked them, "Which of the two did what the father wanted?" What His Father wanted of them, justice, is the obvious meaning of this question. Were they, the leaders, really working for the grandeur of the law, justice, the coming of His Kingdom on earth?

They were trapped. Yet, they were bright enough to state the obvious. The second son, reluctant at first, saw the light and did

at last what he first refused to do. He worked for justice in the Kingdom. He served the law. He was obviously the better son.

Now, gently but firmly, Jesus presses home the point to those committed to justice, but who, in fact, were serving themselves, not the oppressed.

In this post-Nixonian age, I wish we could find another translation to the one that begins, "Let me make it clear." Jesus does though make it clear to these leaders. John, the Baptist, came preaching holiness -- for them it had to be a passion for justice, that was their profession. They put no faith in John. They did not really believe in justice, although that was their profession, their only way to holiness. No, they preferred to serve themselves, to profit from their position, to obfuscate the Torah, the law, not to clarify it and to make it truly serve justice. Rather they used their legal gimmickry to ease the burdens for their friends, the powerful of their world, and likewise added burdens to the oppressed of their day, the poor, the widows, the orphaned, those suffering injustice. And so, like the first son, while professing to serve the Kingdom, to do the will of the Father, in fact they served injustice and falsified their public profession. In another part of the Gospel, Jesus calls this by its true name, "Woe to you, hypocrites."

Now comes the ultimate shocker. To confront them with the magnitude of their dereliction, before justice and the law, Jesus picks the oldest of the professions, the prostitutes, and the most disreputable, the tax collectors, and identifies them with the just

one, the second son, who said no to the invitation and then later regretted his decision and said yes. The prostitutes and the tax collectors listened to John's call to holiness and believed in him. Adding insult to injury, Jesus says to the chief priests and the elders, "Even when you saw that, you did not believe in him."

Jesus then makes perfectly clear what the story means, what the point is that He is making, "Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God before you."

Many years ago in Washington, I knew<sup>a</sup> simple black man named Llewellan Scott. He worked all day in a government office and then at night in a house of hospitality for poor outcasts, unemployed black men. One night the sanctimonious lawyer who owned the house he rented, but for which he was delinquent in paying rent, threw Scott and his detritus of society out into the street, despite the fact that it was wintry cold and his charges were poorly clad. Llewellan went up and down the street seeking refuge for his outcasts. None of the good people were interested. Finally, at 1:00 a.m., he knocked on the door of a house of ill repute, run by one lady named Sally. Sally was ill-humored at first, given the hour and the disreputable company. But not for long. She said, all right, come in. She served hot coffee. She found blankets for the derelicts. She fed them breakfast the next day and kept them until they found new refuge.

Llewellan told me afterwards, "Now I know what the Lord meant when He said that prostitutes would make it into the Kingdom ahead of those so-called good people."

I am sure that, with the inspiration and help of the Holy Spirit, this company will be more perceptive to the message of Jesus than the chief priests and the elders were. Your profession, your invitation to both the service of justice and concurrent holiness is, I trust, seriously heard and followed. You will not say yes and stay home. You may hesitate at times, so do we all and so did the second son. But let us today say yes, heartily and enthusiastically, to do what the Father wants of us for His Kingdom: that justice be served through the law and through the work of those who profess justice, that holiness may be possible to each of you because of this service, and that His Kingdom may come, in our time, through your efforts.

THE RED MASS

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1, 1978

OPENING  
PRAYER:

GOD OUR FATHER, YOU TAUGHT THE HEARTS OF YOUR FAITHFUL PEOPLE BY SENDING THEM THE LIGHT OF YOUR HOLY SPIRIT. MAY YOUR HOLY SPIRIT CONTINUE TO GUIDE IN WISDOM AND LOVE THOSE WHO SERVE AS JUDGES, LEGISLATORS AND EXECUTIVES IN OUR NATION. MAY THEY AND ALL OF US BE FILLED WITH THE FIRE OF YOUR LOVE AND WORK MIGHTILY FOR TRUE JUSTICE AND PEACE.

WE ASK THIS THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, YOUR SON, WHO LIVES AND REIGNS WITH YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD, FOREVER AND EVER.

PRAYER OVER  
THE GIFTS:

FATHER, LOOK WITH KINDNESS ON THE GIFTS WE BRING TO YOUR ALTAR, MAY THE FIRE OF YOUR SPIRIT, WHICH FILLED THE HEARTS OF THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS WITH COURAGE AND LOVE MAKE HOLY OUR LIVES AND THIS SACRIFICE WE OFFER IN YOUR SIGHT.

WE ASK THIS IN THE NAME OF JESUS THE LORD.

PRAYER AFTER  
COMMUNION:

LORD, YOU RENEW EACH OF US WITH THE ONE BREAD AND THE ONE CUP THAT RESTORES THE HUMAN FAMILY TO LIFE. BY OUR SHARING IN THE SACRAMENT OF UNITY FILL US WITH THE GRACE OF YOUR SPIRIT THAT WE MAY WORK FOR THE PROGRESS OF ALL PEOPLES AND LOVINGLY BRING THE WORK OF JUSTICE TO PERFECTION.

WE ASK THIS THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD.

THE RED MASS  
SOLEMN BLESSING

THE FATHER OF LIGHT HAS ENLIGHTENED THE MINDS OF THE DISCIPLES BY  
THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. MAY HE BLESS YOU AND GIVE YOU THE  
GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT FOR EVER. AMEN.

MAY THAT FIRE WHICH HOVERED OVER THE DISCIPLES AS TONGUES OF FLAME  
BURN IN YOUR HEARTS AND MAKE THEM GLOW WITH HIS PURE LIGHT. AMEN.

MAY GOD'S GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT DIRECT YOUR STEPS TO HIMSELF AND  
INSPIRE YOU TO WALK AND TO SERVE IN CHARITY AND PEACE. AMEN.

MAY ALMIGHTY GOD BLESS YOU, THE FATHER, AND THE SON + AND THE HOLY  
SPIRIT. AMEN.

