

Homily – Red Mass – October 6, 2016

It is my pleasure to once again join with the School of Law at St. Mary's University to celebrate this year's "Red Mass." I welcome all of you from the legal profession this evening as we prayerfully reflect on the vital and honorable service that comes from your vocation that helps to ensure an orderly society, while serving the common good. We gather in this sacred place to commit ourselves to serve our brothers and sisters in the spirit of justice, tempered by mercy.

The greatest hope and vision expressed in tonight's Psalm seem at odds with the day-to-day challenges faced by our society. He proclaims; "Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss. Truth will spring from the earth; justice will look down from heaven." **The Psalmist** is attempting to describe God's kingdom living in each one of us and wherever the Father's love, mercy, and peace prevail. How can a world that seeks solutions in retribution and vengeance embrace Jesus' command to turn the other cheek and ultimately allow "justice and peace to kiss"?

Pope Francis tells us that justice and mercy are not in conflict with one another. He says, "in reality it's not like this, because it's precisely the mercy of God that brings fulfillment of true justice." In tonight's gospel Jesus teaches us that the justice of retribution, "An eye for an eye and a

tooth for a tooth”, is not His way and must not be our way. Instead he tells us to “Turn the other cheek.” He calls upon us to love our enemies and pray for those who do us harm. This may sound like a total surrender to evil, but it is not. Jesus is telling us that our response to our enemy, those who insult us, steal from us, even rob us of our human dignity, should be not one of surrender, but one of love. He is not calling us to live our lives in fear or passivity, but instead live our lives in a way that confronts the unjust and the immoral with a merciful heart that will lead them to conversion, a change of life....a change of heart...instead of relying on punishment that only leads to bitterness and hate, reinforcing the very behavior it seeks to rid from the world. This is the path that leads us to a crossroads where we can merge justice with mercy. Justice becomes the medicine that restores health, opening the pathway to mercy.

St. Frances De Sales, who himself was admitted to the Bar in France in an effort to follow in the footsteps of his father, merged his learning of the law with his calling to the priesthood. He lived a life of holiness, restoring many to the true faith. While Jesus’ call to mercy in today’s gospel may seem impossible in an imperfect judicial system of laws and punishments, St. Frances tells us how we can show the world that Jesus’ call to mercy is possible; “You learn to speak by speaking, to study by studying, to run by running, to work by working; and just so,

you learn to love by loving.” Let us allow the Holy Spirit to empower us with his gifts to have the courage and wisdom to seek to truth in all you do and, practicing the virtues of faith, hope, charity, and courage, work toward a more just society that truly protects the rights and freedoms of every individual in a way that unites us so that we may seek justice for all.

This evening we will be calling upon God to bless each one of you , to complete the good work he has begun in you and walk with you each day as you carry out your good work. I encourage you to allow your ethic of love and mercy guide your understanding of justice. Hold fast to the words given to us in St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians; "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." When His peace fills your hearts, you will then be able to share it with others and “justice and peace will kiss.” And that kiss is the expression of the Divine Mercy.