

Dear friends,

It is a joy for me to celebrate this mass with you again this year. The celebration of the Red Mass has become an important tradition for both the Church and the legal community because in both the Church and the Law there is an utmost regard for the human person. The Law stands as the guardian of the rights and social obligations of the human person, while the Church is present as the guardian of the human soul's salvation and the formation of the human conscience.

The words of Jesus in today's gospel proclamation are a bit startling at first hearing. They seem so abrupt. "The Kingdom of God is at hand! Repent and believe in the gospel!" Then he proceeds to call his first disciples, Andrew and Peter, then James and John. They follow him immediately. But we know the fuller story. Those who have responded to Jesus so quickly and easily will be few in number. By the end of the gospel the once adoring crowds will have turned on Jesus, demanding his crucifixion. And even these early and loyal disciples will have melted away with Jesus' arrest.

In Jesus' human nature it would be easy to understand that he could feel discouragement. Each of us can feel a deep burden of discouragement at many turning points in life. Discouragement could cause us to wish to withdraw from our mission, wishing to quietly disappear from life's challenges. Or, discouragement can leave us cynical, becoming like snapping turtles to all those around us and despairing of anything good. After suffering a defeat in a law trial against him in England, it was the recently canonized Cardinal St.

John Henry Newman who, reflecting on the urge to withdraw from social engagement, put his reflection in poetic form. He said, “I sought to hear the voice of God and climbed the topmost steeple, but God declared: "Go down again – for I dwell among the people.”

Not everyone will accept our mission in either the legal world or the Church. Sometimes we will be a source of division – even when we seek to avoid it. And yet, as Jesus had to continue his journey toward Jerusalem and what awaited him there, so too we must go forward proclaiming both justice and reconciliation in our world.

Last year, in his audience after Easter, Our Holy Father Pope Francis reflected on justice and reconciliation. His concern was for us to understand the unmerited love and forgiveness we had received in Christ’s Paschal drama. He said, “Not everything in life is resolved with justice. No. Especially where a counterweight to evil must be placed, someone must love beyond what is due, to re-begin a story of grace. Jesus replaces the law of revenge with the law of love: “What God has done for me, I return to you,” he said.

Justice, in the hands of the cynic, becomes revenge. Faith, in the hands of the discouraged, becomes a withdrawal from encounter. But the beauty of the law is that it can be a source of restoration! A counterweight to evil, as the Pope has said. In order to keep that vision, one must have faith – a faith to re-begin the story of grace. May the story of grace re-begin within each of us!