

## 2020 Red Mass

Honorable friends in the legal community and friends in the faith,

It is wonderful to be with you again as we celebrate our annual Red Mass for the legal community here in San Antonio. It is especially a blessing to gather during these challenging days of the pandemic and to recognize our special calling and the contributions we can make at this time. Although our courts were closed for some time last spring, we have found ways of satisfying the needs of our people through technology and mutual cooperation. I thank you, on behalf of the people, for your fidelity to the law and to the fair and swift resolution of justice.

The readings chosen for today – and by the way, today is also the celebration in the Catholic Church of the Memorial of Pope St. John Paul II – speak of bringing good news to the people, news of healing, hope, and restoration, and of our responsibility to care for and attend to God’s people. There can be no doubt in our minds that life for the average person has changed rather considerably in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. In our nation nearly 20 million people remain unemployed or underemployed. Small business owners have lost considerable amounts of income, and even the complete loss of their businesses. Property owners have gone for months without receiving their rent monies, and thousands of families are simply awaiting the day of eviction. Schools have attempted to reopen, but with halting results. Although the death rate has somewhat declined,

the infection rate among the people continues to climb. And so, the need for messages of restoration and the need for proper care for our people is as clear as it has ever been in our lifetimes.

I have addressed the need for careful planning and preparation for a new moment in our lives in my recent Pastoral Letter, *Transformed by Hope, Let Us Rebuild Our Tomorrow!* We recognize that we are in a special crisis at this time – in fact, the crisis of our lifetimes! While some look for a restoration of the pre-Covid past once the pandemic is controlled, others look to the future with fear and trepidation. A crisis, by definition, is the crossroad between danger and opportunity. Yes, we are in a dangerous moment, and yes, we have a unique opportunity to reform and renew our lives, both in a personal and societal sense! What we must do, friends, is not waste the opportunity.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, released his letter to the Church and the world, which is called an *encyclical*, by the name of *Fratelli Tutti*, Italian for “We are all brothers,” (and by implication, sisters) two weeks after I wrote my letter to the faithful. These letters are a happy coincidence, and touch on some similar themes. If I may say so, the point is to take this moment in which the world has had to slow down for its own wellbeing to pause, take stock of where we are, and then to make and implement needed change for the common wellbeing of the whole human family!

Simply within our own nation not only have we had to awaken to the health crisis, problems of distribution, and the moral and ethical concerns related to our healthcare system, but we have also been

**confronted with the historical impact of past and current racism, economic and political exclusion, and the systematic lack of opportunity for so many people within our civic life. We cannot ignore this moment! We cannot let this opportunity for a renewed vision of what can be accomplished today and tomorrow pass us by!**

**You in the legal and political community bear a special responsibility in this moment to be agents of repair! Through use of the legal system let us correct past mistakes, offer new opportunities, and help to heal our land! We cannot allow ourselves to be simply trapped in an adversarial system that can be used to tear us apart! No! The whole point of human law, from the time of Hammurabi to the present, has been to rebalance and restore social and personal harmony! And so, let us have the beautiful feet of those who bring good news of hope and restoration to the people. Let us attend, as good shepherds for the sheep, to the wellbeing of our people by guarding and feeding them properly. Let us not waste this moment, but make of ourselves the needed agents of change, aided by the grace of God! Amen.**