

Homily
"RED MASS"
Bishop Robert J. Baker, S.T.D.
May 22, 2008
Cathedral of St. Paul
for
Area Attorneys, Government Officials,
Members of the Judiciary and Legislators
Sponsored by the St. Thomas More Society

My dear friends in the legal profession and in positions of government responsibility, it is an honor to be with you today to pray with you and for you in your endeavors to bring truth and justice into the society in which we live. Truth and justice are virtues that may seem at times so elusive. Your role as attorneys, prosecutors and judges is to do all in your power to help our city, state and nation find stability through justice and truth.

And your being here today suggests that you see those virtues as rooted in the truth and justice that God established for his world at the beginning of time, truth and justice that were not obliterated by the sin of Adam and Eve, but were made more difficult to retrieve, discover and live. We who follow the pathway of Christ believe that his grace will help us recover those virtues and values so essential to societal and world peace.

In my early days on this earth in the 1940's the great "isms" that confronted the world to shatter justice and truth were the totalitarian regimes promoting Communism, Nazism and Fascism.

They were extreme forms of world power centered in leaders who wanted to dominate, conquer and control other nations and other people with ideologies that were fundamentally man-centered and opposed to religion.

In addition to global terrorism, as Pope Benedict XVI has pointed out, there are new "isms" that are just as potent and just as harmful that confront the world in which we live and make your life and mine more difficult in our effort to define them and confront them.

Those "isms" are Relativism, Secularism and Materialism. All three influence one another. All three are corrosive of truth and justice.

Relativism undermines our ability to acknowledge any truth as worthy of adherence. The philosopher Jacques Maritain succinctly described the thinking that leads us to relativize all objective truth. He refers to the people in society who think that "Not to believe in any truth, or not to adhere firmly to any assertion as unshakably true in itself, is a primary condition required of Democratic Citizens in order to be tolerant of one another and to live in peace with one another."

Maritain maintains that "it is through rational means—that is, through persuasion, not coercion, that man is bound by his nature to try to induce others to share in what he knows or claims to know as true and just."

In a democratic society trust should be pursued with honesty and sincerity. Truth should be revered not relativized. All law reflects moral and ethical standards derived from the honest pursuit of the trust. And believers in God see God as the author of truth. A democratic society promotes an honest and open discussion of the where's and why's of truth. Pope John Paul II wrote an encyclical on reason and faith and their compatibility in the discovery of truth that upholds reason's pursuit of the truth.

Secularism and materialism share the same displaced emphasis on the temporal order and the pursuit of the material world as the be-all and end-all of life, with no vision of the transcendent reality of life hereafter.

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor documents the emergence of this thrust in his recent book *A SECULAR AGE*, published by Harvard University Press. He argues that an exclusive humanism has developed "because of a complex series of shifts in outlook and assumptions about God, the world, the human person, time, and morality" (See article in *Commonweal*, May 9, 2008, P.15). While Taylor sees progress in some areas of the movement, in the area of human rights, individual freedom, including freedom of conscience and personal responsibility to combat suffering and injustice, he also sees the negative shift from God's goal for creatures, which "had once included love, praise, and worship of the Divine" as now being understood more narrowly as building a "moral order for human benefit" (*Ibid.* p.17).

Maritain suggests that the great concern and the only thing that matters for these people is "the temporal vocation of the human race, with its march, embattled but victorious, to justice, peace and happiness. Instead of realizing that our devotion to the temporal task must be that much firmer and more ardent, since we know that the human race will never succeed on this earth in delivering itself completely from evil—because of the wounds of Adam, and because our ultimate end is supernatural—they make of these earthly goals the truly supreme end for humanity.

"In other words, there is henceforth only the earth." According to Maritain this results in "A complete temporalization of Christianity" (pgs. 97 & 98 in *THE MARITAIN READER*).

In the beautiful play written by Robert Bolt Thomas More, in prison, is speaking to his daughter, Margaret, and Will Roper. "Now Listen, Will. And, Meg, you listen, too, you know I know you well. God made the Angels to show him splendor—as he made animals for innocence and plants for their simplicity. But man he made to serve him wittily, in the tangle of his mind."

Robert Bolt says it well through the words of Sir Thomas More: "Man he made to serve him wittily, in the tangle of his mind."

There was an age, and it was before our own, when people acknowledged that God created us to know, love and serve him and be happy with him in heaven. That age also acknowledged that God made man to serve him wittily, in the tangle of his mind. Thomas More was part of an age that acknowledged that God gave us a rational faculty that could be used to find its way in life to the truth, with the help of God's grace. That human beings, endowed with intelligence, once saw this world not as an end, but as a means to something and someone beyond it.

When that view of reality predominated, it was so much easier to find meaning and truth in life and to discover God as the basis for truth and justice.

Could we, those of us in the clergy and the legal profession, help these people of this post-modern secular world, with its relativistic, secularistic and materialistic bent discover truth, justice and, yes, love once again, and where we don't find them present, place them there to the best of our ability.

Let us pray for one another that we never lose our own bearings or our appreciation for the fundamental ability we have to discover trust and justice, aided as we are today, and every time we have recourse to God through prayer.

Prayer helps us put everything back in context. Prayer helps us find our way through a maze of conflicting ideologies. Prayer helps us know there is a truth and helps us give that ultimate truth a name. Prayer helps us see priorities and set them in relation to the great priority of eternal life with God.

I happily commend you and all who labor with you to the great God who is the lord of life and of love, the lord of truth, justice and mercy.

And I commend and compliment you for taking time out from your busy schedules to make time for God. I know he will aid you, as he assists all who call upon him in sincere pursuit of the truth.

May church and state maintain their separate roles and responsibilities, but always see their roles and responsibilities in relation to God and Father of us all, in whom we live and love and have our being. To him be power and glory, forever and ever. Amen.