

**Red Mass Homily for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

May 16, 2017

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

“Perseverance, Gratitude and Peace in the Legal Vocation”

Reverend Clergy, consecrated Religious, Governor Rauner, Speaker and Mrs. Madigan, Chief Justice Karmeier, honored justices and judges, civic officials, fellow attorneys, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is a privilege to be with you and the members of the St. Thomas More Lawyer’s Guild here in Springfield for this Red Mass, so called because of the red vestments that we wear to symbolize the Holy Spirit, whose blessings we invoke on the community of legal professionals and public officials in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

Taking time in this Red Mass to reflect on the spiritual aspects of our vocation to the legal profession and public service provides an occasion for us to remember the privilege that we have been given to serve the people in our communities as attorneys, judges, legislators and government officials. Inevitably, challenges come in our vocations in the legal

profession and public service, and so we turn to the Lord to strengthen us during the hardships that we encounter throughout our careers.

Reflecting on this reality, I am reminded of the story a priest who was approached by a man seeking advice before the man departed to serve in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Having seen what war can do to people, the priest left their conversation saying, "Don't let your heart be hardened by all that you will see and encounter during your tour in Bagdad."

For us lawyers, how easily can our hearts be hardened by the hardships that we encounter in our profession? How easily can we fall into despair when encountering stories of the many hardships facing people in our beloved state? How easily can public servants develop a hardened heart when pelted with the verbal stones of a personal attack, a misleading news story or negative political ad?

In today's readings our Lord shows us where we can turn when the hardships we encounter throughout our civic and legal vocations make it easy for us to develop a hardened heart, become cynical or forget to love.

In the first reading, The Acts of the Apostles introduces us to the hardships that the early Christian community faced when spreading the Gospel. Today, we heard an account of Saint Paul being pelted with real

stones because he was converting the Gentiles (Acts 14:19). Did you notice how he responded to this attack that threatened his life? The Apostle simply got up, entered the city and on the following day, “he left with Barnabas for Derbe” (Acts 14:20). In the midst of almost being murdered, Saint Paul persevered in his ministry to preach the Gospel and baptize. The reading shows us that the attack on Saint Paul was not a singular occurrence in the early Christian community, when stating, “They strengthened the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying, ‘It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God’” (Acts 14: 22).

You might be saying to yourself, “I know a thing or two about hardships in my life.” Despite the many times of joy that we have been given, we all have encountered many hardships. At times, it even may seem that our legal profession and our public service comes with an overabundance of hardships. Saint Paul’s actions point us towards the importance of perseverance when faced with hardships, but this reading also gives us another way to counter-act the negative effects of the hardships we encounter. The reading continues, “And when they arrived, they called the Church together and reported what God had done with

them” (Acts 14:27). In the midst of one of the most difficult times in the Early Christian community there was no despair or abandoning the mission, but there was a celebration of what God had done through each one of his loyal disciples.

What has God done with and for each one of us here today? Take a moment to look over your own life and see God’s hand in bringing you to your vocation. Can you see all the family members, friendships, mentors, priests, religious sisters or colleagues that God has brought into your life to mold your vocation as a legal professional or a public servant? What about all the degrees, the votes, political appointments or job opportunities that God has blessed you with throughout your career? You see gratitude is the second antidote found in today’s first reading for preventing the development of a hardened heart. During times of hardship throughout our lives and careers, let us remember to ask God for the strength to persevere and the eyes to see the blessings that he has bestowed upon us.

Today’s Gospel reading begins with our Lord speaking the words, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid”* (John 14:27). In the Scriptures, we see the word “peace” has a deeper meaning than a mere

absence of war or conflict. The Hebrew word *Shalom*, or peace, includes connotations of well-being in all areas of one's life such as, strong physical health, economic prosperity, a good name, good spiritual health and a long life. But Jesus does not only say "peace" to his disciples, he says, "Peace I LEAVE with you, my peace I GIVE to you." Jesus gives his deep and abiding peace as a gift to his followers, both those surrounding him during the event described in the Gospel as well as everyone gathered here for this celebration of the Eucharist.

So where do we access this peace referenced by Jesus during his ministry? It is through the Holy Spirit, the namesake of today's Red Mass. In the Sacrament of Confirmation we receive a full access to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each one of us has to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to fill us with this sacred peace. How does Jesus' gift of peace relate to your vocation in the law or in government? Is your heart hardened? Are you discouraged? Have you become cynical towards what good can come from your work? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit for peace and guidance. Are you faced with judging a difficult case, have a contentious policy decision to make, lack clarity in regards to an upcoming vote? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit for peace and guidance. Are you encountering toxic office politics at

your firm, uncertain about an important personnel decision or uncertain where to go in your career? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit for peace and guidance. Brothers and sisters in Christ, our Lord knows that the legal vocation and government service are not easy, and so he has given us the Holy Spirit as a great advocate helping to guide our work. To access this Advocate all we have to do is to pray, asking for peace and guidance.

Lastly, Jesus reconfirms that we will experience temptations and hardships in this world staying, "For the ruler of the world is coming. He has no power over me" (John 14:30). We see this reality in the dynamic of sin that everyone encounters on a daily basis. While He is warning us of evil influences in the earthly world, Jesus reminds us that He will not leave us to face hardships alone when stating, "I am going away and I will come back to you'" (John 14:31). In many ways, this section of the Gospel is a challenge for all of us with a vocation in law or government service. Attorneys, judges, legislators and government officials have been given the authority, privilege and blessing to serve the wider public. At the end of our earthly days, each one of us will face a meeting with the Lord and his possible question, "What good have you done with all of the blessings that I have bestowed upon you?"

Not too long ago in a running store where I was buying a new pair of running shoes, I saw a poster with a picture of the legendary long-distance runner and 1972 Olympian, Steve Prefontaine. On the poster one finds a quote from Prefontaine stating, "To give anything LESS than your BEST, is to sacrifice the GIFT." Today's Gospel reading and this quote communicate a profound message to each one of us gifted with being blessed with the legal vocation and public service.

Therefore, as we reflect on the gift of our vocation in the legal profession and public service, let us thank the Lord for the blessings that He has bestowed upon us. Let us also pray and ask for the Holy Spirit to give us the strength of perseverance during hardships, peace in times of trouble, and guidance throughout our lives.

May God give us this grace. Amen.