

“The Baptismal Vocation of Holiness and the Practice of Law”

**Reflections Following the Nassau County Red Mass for the
Diocese of Rockville Centre**

October 5, 2021

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

- Thank you all for sticking around after Mass for another discussion.

Bishop Barres, thank you again for inviting me here for the Red Mass of the Diocese of Rockville Center. Bishop Barres asked if I would share some after-dinner remarks with you in the form of some spiritual reflections, and I am pleased to do so. I would like to talk with you about “The Baptismal Vocation of Holiness and the Practice of Law.”

- How many of you want to become saints? We should all want to be saints! By virtue of baptism, we become sons and daughters of God. As such, we are called to live as members of God’s family. This “call” from God is known as a “vocation,” from the Latin word *vocare* = to call. Ultimately, to be holy means to be a saint, i.e., to live forever in God’s kingdom.

- In the First Letter of St. Peter, we read, “Become holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, after the likeness of the holy One who called you; remember, Scripture says, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16, quoting Leviticus 19:2).
- In the First Letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, we are told that our holiness is the “will of God,” which means that we are to love one another with mutual charity, while refraining from immorality and lustful passions (1 Thess. 4:1-12).
- My approach to talking about “The Baptismal Vocation of Holiness and the Practice of Law” will be to give some personal reflections inspired by the lives of nine saints: Pope St. John Paul II, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, St. Francis de Sales, St. Josemaría Escrivá, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Vincent DePaul, St. Thomas More, St. John Fisher, and the Blessed Virgin Mary. Just as we look to nine people sitting on the U.S. Supreme Court to guide us, we look to the saints for their spiritual guidance.

- Why saints? Saints are our heroes for holiness, and I have some personal connection with each of these nine saints in my path to holiness.
- In my lifetime, I have been blessed to meet two saints in person: Pope St. John Paul II and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta. I met Pope St. John Paul II many times while I was doing my graduate studies in canon law in Rome, and it was he who appointed me to be a bishop in 2003. At the Masses for the Installation of a New Pastor, I like to quote from our late Holy Father, the Great Pope Saint John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, "On Entering the New Millennium," which I quote as follows (nos. 30-31): "First of all, I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness."
- I met St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta also when I was doing my doctoral studies in Rome, and I used to celebrate Mass for the Missionaries of Charity at their convent of San Gregorio located near the Colosseum. Mother Teresa came into the sacristy after Mass to thank me for celebrating the Mass. This was in the late 1980s or early 1990s and I didn't have a cell phone, so I don't have a selfie with Mother Teresa!

- Both Pope St. John Paul II and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta exuded a sense of holiness even while they were alive. It is hard to describe, but there was a palpable sense around them that you were in the presence of a saintly person!
- St. Francis de Sales is significant for me not only because I was appointed a bishop on his feast day, January 24, 2003, but also because he was speaking about the universal call to holiness centuries before the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s. Appointed Bishop of Geneva, Switzerland, in 1602, Saint Francis de Sales wrote his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, in which he said that “devotion must be practiced in different ways by the nobleman and by the working man, by the servant and by the prince, by the widow, by the unmarried girl and by the married woman. But even this distinction is not sufficient; for the practice of devotion must be adapted to the strength, to the occupation and to the duties of each one in particular. . . It is therefore an error and even a heresy to wish to exclude the exercise of devotion from military divisions, from the artisans’ shops, from the courts of princes, from

family households. . . . Therefore, in whatever situations we happen to be, we can and we must aspire to the life of perfection.”

- St. Josemaría Escrivá echoed these themes in the Twentieth Century and inspired the articulation of the universal call to holiness of the Second Vatican Council as expressed in chapter 5 of *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. In 1928, St. Josemaría Escrivá founded *Opus Dei*, Latin for “the Work of God,” specifically to assist people as they seek to grow closer to God and serve their brothers and sisters in whatever state of life they happen to be. He taught that all the baptized are called to seek sanctity and spread the Gospel through faithful witness in the ordinary words and actions of their daily lives. He wrote, “Our professional vocation is an essential and inseparable part of our condition as Christians. Our Lord wants you to be holy in the place where you are, in the job you have chosen for whatever reason. To me, every job that is not opposed to the divine law is good and noble, and capable of being raised to the supernatural plane,

that is inserted into the constant flow of Love which defines the life of a child of God” (St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, p. 60).

- I became a cooperator of *Opus Dei* in the 1990s and more recently joined the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross as a way to foster and deepen my own spirituality as a secular priest and a diocesan bishop. Personally, I have found the “plan of life” established by St. Josemaría to be very helpful in my spiritual life, and I highly recommend it for you as well. The specific practices in the “plan of life” are referred to as “norms” and consist of the following:
 - Morning Offering
 - Mental prayer, also known as meditation
 - Daily Mass, Communion, and Thanksgiving after Communion
 - Rosary
 - Spiritual reading
 - Small acts of penance or mortification
 - A short visit to the tabernacle
 - *The Preces*, a prayer which is specific to *Opus Dei*

- Praying the *Angelus* each day at noon
 - Examination of Conscience at the end of the day
 - Three Hail Marys at bedtime
 - The Sign of the Cross with holy water
- St. Ignatius of Loyola is important to me because I was taught by Jesuit priests in my undergraduate studies at Loyola University in Chicago and at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois. The Society of Jesus has a reputation for academic excellence, and so we should strive to keep up with our continuing education and scholarship not just for CLE credits, but for our own personal betterment. As I learned in my first-year Latin class in high school, *non pro schola, sed pro vita* (not for school, but for life). And as the Jesuits have for their motto, *ad maiorem Dei gloriam* (for the greater glory of God).
 - St. Vincent DePaul has a special place in my heart not only because I graduated from DePaul University College of Law in Chicago, but also because of his selfless example of serving the poor. I speak to you today not only as a Catholic bishop, but also as a fellow lawyer. I went to law

school after I was ordained a priest. I describe my law degree as a tool for ministry. I wanted to help the poor, but I didn't want just to talk about it. I wanted to put my faith into action, so I co-founded the Chicago Legal Clinic to help provide legal services for the poor. Heroes for holiness like St. Vincent DePaul and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta show us how to put our concern for the poor into concrete deeds and actions, not mere words and platitudes. I hope they inspire you, as well, to give generously and cheerfully of your time *pro bono publico*.

- St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher are significant as my personal patron saints because I was baptized Thomas John. My parents did not have these saints in mind at my christening, but I gravitated to St. Thomas More when I was admitted to the bar in 1981 and was appointed Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1992. Also, my favorite movie of all time is the 1966 film, *A Man for All Seasons*, for which Paul Scofield won the Oscar Award as Best Actor for his depiction of St. Thomas More. Remarkably, as seen from our 21st

century perspective, the film also won Academy Awards for screenplay, cinematography, costume design, Best Director, and Best Picture.

- Very relevant for our time is Sir Thomas More's description of the inviolability of one's personal conscience, as he tells the Duke of Norfolk, "What matters is not that it's true, but that I believe it; or no, not that I **believe** it, but that *I* believe it."
- Particularly compelling is this dialogue from Robert Bolt's screenplay of the Duke of Norfolk's efforts to persuade Sir Thomas More to sign the Succession to the Crown Act of 1534:
 - Norfolk says, "Oh, confound all this. ... I'm not a scholar, as Master Cromwell never tires of pointing out, and frankly, I don't know whether the [King's] marriage was lawful or not. But damn it, Thomas, look at those names. ... You know those men! Can't you do what I did, and come with us, for fellowship?"
 - More responds pointedly: "And when we stand before God, and you are sent to Paradise for doing according to your conscience,

and I am damned for not doing according to mine, will you come with me – for ‘fellowship’?”

- These insights about conscience are very pertinent as conscience protections in our civil laws are increasingly being threatened.
- St. John Fisher, who served as Bishop of Rochester, became more important to me when I became a bishop, and especially so when I was installed as Bishop of Springfield in Illinois on June 22, 2010, the feast day of Saints John Fisher and Thomas More. St. John Fisher stands out as the only Catholic bishop in England who remained faithful to the Catholic Church with the Pope as her head, rather than give in to the demands of King Henry VIII that he be recognized as the Head of the Church of England, to which the other bishops in England acquiesced in cowardly fashion.
- It may be tempting to think that John Fisher is less applicable to you as civil lawyers, since he was a priest and a bishop, but not a lawyer, unlike St. Thomas More. I believe that St. John Fisher’s life is applicable to yours as well, especially when you look at it through the prism of

secular leadership principles. I have spent a lot of time studying leadership formally and thinking about it informally. My formal education in leadership began when I was a young priest (33 years old) and was accepted as a fellow in Leadership Greater Chicago.

- More recently, as a bishop, I earned an MBA at the Mendoza College of Business at the University of Notre Dame. In my MBA classes, we had courses like leadership decision-making and leadership communication.
- There are many schools of thought and different theories about the qualities of a good leader, often focusing, as they should, on virtues, values, character and integrity. But what I am often looking for, and rarely find, is a discussion of the relationship between leading and following.
- By definition, leading implies that someone will be following. But how do you get someone to follow you? What if you try to lead, but no one follows? Are you still a leader? St. John Fisher was alone among the bishops of his time to remain faithful to the true Church rather than surrender to the order of the King demanding obeisance to his claim to

be the supreme head of the Church of England. Yet, St. John Fisher did not persuade any of his colleagues to follow him. Perhaps that was not his fault as much as it was the timidity and cowardice of his brother bishops.

- Leaders sometimes need to be outliers, doing what is right, but taking the risk that no one will follow, and you will be left to stand alone. Some examples from my experiences can be seen in my decrees on same-sex marriage, gender identity, and telling pro-abortion Catholic politicians not to go to Holy Communion.
- At other times, perhaps we become accidental leaders, not setting out to try to gain followers, but inspiring others to follow a path that they admire or a goal that they share. President Abraham Lincoln, Springfield's most famous citizen, whom I and many others consider to be our nation's greatest President, often remarked that events shaped him more than he shaped events.
- In my homily this evening, I focused on the leadership principle that John Fisher most embodied: modeling the way. He modeled the way by

refusing to back down from what he knew was right. When the King of England demanded the acceptance of his schismatic and immoral views, John Fisher refused. He continued to preach and teach the truth, without ever compromising the values that he knew were right.

- Modeling the way leads to a second principle of leadership: inspiring a shared vision. Setting an example for others helps bring them along. Sure enough, John Fisher set an example that caused others to join him. They knew what they were doing would be costly. But the saint's leadership convinced them it was worth it.
- As leaders in your fields, you are called to this same mission. Christ asks us to model the way, which is to live a rightly ordered life. So does He ask us to inspire a shared vision, evangelizing those around us.
- It's worth asking yourselves, on a daily basis: Am I modeling the way? Am I inspiring a shared vision? Simply asking these questions can transform our own witness in the workplace.
- When asked to do something wrong on behalf of a client, you'll know the right answer. When asked about your faith, you'll give an answer

that opens others' hearts to the truth. There are countless ways for you to set an example and engage others.

- Admittedly, modeling the way is never easy. Sometimes it may even clash with the demands placed upon you by work and the secular world. Once again, John Fisher shows the path forward.
- When Henry VIII demanded his allegiance, Fisher could easily have assented, and improved his own career. He probably would have risen to the top of the hierarchy in England before too long. And yet he didn't. He knew well the Scripture Verse: What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?
- As one author has noted, Fisher's "blatant disregard for careerism made him a model" for others. Here we see another example of how modeling the way also helps inspired a shared vision. Both are necessary for good leaders, and practicing the first promotes the second.
- Saint John Fisher once said, "A good man is not a perfect man; a good man is an honest man, faithful and unhesitatingly responsive to the voice of God in his life." These words describe what all of you can be.

They are what all of you must be. And I trust that they are what all of you will be, as leaders in the public square.

- Finally, we turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the model Christian who surpasses all the other saints. Indeed, the Archangel Gabriel proclaimed that Mary was “full of grace” (Luke 1:28). We do well to follow the instruction about her Son that Mary gave to the servers at the wedding in Cana, “Do whatever He tells you” (John 2:5).
- You carry a burden on your shoulders, but you do not carry it alone. Your burden is the cross, and you share it with the Lord. God and the Saints are there to guide you, and help you become the faithful leader you were born to be.
- The Sacraments help you practice and perfect the spiritual qualities of leadership. Pope St. John Paul II, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, St. Francis de Sales, St. Josemaría Escrivá, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Vincent DePaul, St. Thomas More, St. John Fisher, and the Blessed Virgin Mary show the way.

- God's grace will give you the strength to chart a faithful course in your daily life, just as it did with the saints, our heroes of holiness. They led well because they loved God well. The same can be true of all of you.
- The task we face is not easy. The challenges in today's world are growing, not shrinking. The culture is urging us to abandon what we believe. Heroic courage is the antidote. It springs from our trust in God, and it is strengthened when we turn to God's grace.
- May God give us this grace. Amen.
- Thank you again for having me.