

**Homily for the Saint Thomas More Lawyers Guild of Springfield Mass
Monday of the Sixth Week in Ordinary Time
February 17, 2014**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that you have made the extra effort to come here in this inclement weather and have taken the time on this federal holiday to attend our conference of the Saint Thomas More Lawyers Guild of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. We had the opportunity to hear the presentation of Professor Peter Salsich, Jr., of the St. Louis University School of Law, who spoke on the Pro Bono Aspects of a Lawyer's Professional Responsibility. We have also considered practical steps to put this theory into practice through our new Catholic Charities Legal Services Program. Now we take the added step of putting all this into the context of our Catholic faith and sanctify the sacrifices we make in the course of our professional lives by offering this Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

In our first reading today, we hear from the Letter of St. James who begins his letter in the following way: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1). It can be easy for us, when reading a line like this, to move beyond it so as to jump into the heart of the letter. This introduction, however, is not just a passing formality. It is, rather, a statement of great significance in that it communicates to the reader the identity by which the author would like to be known, namely, as a servant of God.

If you were to read the introduction of the majority of the letters of St. Paul, you would find a similar practice of his self-identification as a servant and apostle of Christ. While some may read such introductions as a way for the authors to prove their credibility to their audiences, these words of identification were far more than just empty words. This can easily be seen by the fact that these disciples of Jesus continued to identify themselves with Him when it would have not been to their advantage, but would have brought upon them criticism and even persecution for their witnessing to their faith. Such is the true mark of an authentic follower of Jesus, one who identifies with Him regardless of how they are received by those around them.

There are many examples in the history of the Church of saints who have boldly identified themselves with Christ even to the point of losing their lives. One such example, which is very appropriate to us as lawyers, is the example of St. Thomas More who was executed for his steadfast identification with Christ and His Church in the face of persecution. In the scene at the end of the movie about his life, *A Man for All Seasons*, More is given the opportunity to speak a few final words before being beheaded. He offers a brief explanation that sums up his life as he identifies himself with the following words: "I die His Majesty's good servant...but God's first."

The example of St. Thomas More is an inspiration for all of us to continually remind ourselves that in our work as lawyers, judges, and legal professionals, we are to identify ourselves in a similar way, first and foremost as servants of God. There is a mindset in our country which is uneasy with those in public service who identify themselves in this way. There is a fear that by following God as our first priority, we will somehow be influenced to act in a way that is harmful to society and contrary to true progress and the common good. Nothing can be further from the truth, for by being obedient followers of Christ and His Church, we offer an

approach to the challenges of our society that is based on principles which promote the value and dignity of every human being and the true common good, not just for some, but for all.

To live our lives as being identified first with God is no easy task. To say that we believe what God teaches in the Scriptures and through the Church is one thing, but to put those beliefs into practice, especially in the area of public service, will bring with it no shortage of challenges and trials. The prospect of these challenges must not frighten us, though. As he continues in our first reading, James encourages us in this regard when he writes: "Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance" (James 1:2-3). By standing for the truth in the face of opposition, we grow in that perseverance, which, as Jesus Himself tells us, "will secure [our] lives" (Luke 21:19).

Today, our country celebrates President's Day, a day in which we commemorate the birthdays of our first President, George Washington, who was born on February 22nd, and our 16th President, Springfield's own Abraham Lincoln, who was born on February 12th. We also remember the many contributions that all the past presidents of this country have made

to help us become a great nation. We are mindful of the ways in which these men have used their God-given gifts to guide our nation. There are many inspiring examples of good that has been done by them. There are, unfortunately, instances when those gifts have been used poorly to their disadvantage and that of our country. It is our responsibility as citizens of this country and servants of justice and the common good to seek to assist the leaders of our country in their governance, but we must never allow ourselves to forget that we are God's servants first.

By living with God as our first priority, we work to ensure that the laws of our country are in conformity with the natural and divine law which have been given to us by God so that we might come to experience not only the well-ordering of society, but will more importantly prepare us for our true citizenship which is in Heaven (Philippians 3:20).

As we prepare to receive our Lord in the Eucharist today, let us ask Him for the wisdom to know how to best serve God's people and for the courage to put that wisdom into practice in the work that has been entrusted to us. May we be encouraged by the example of the saints who identified themselves in word and deed and God's servants first that we too may persevere in our journey and merit to hear those words at the end

of our lives: “Well done, my good and faithful servant... Come, share your master's joy” (Matthew 25:23).

May God give us this grace. Amen.