

First Annual Third Circuit Red Mass
The Twenty-Second Sunday of the Year (B)
August 30, 2015

Saint Boniface Catholic Church, Edwardsville, Illinois

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

S.S.P. "What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?"

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good to be with you here at Saint Boniface Catholic Church for this First Annual Third Circuit Red Mass. The name "Red Mass" derives from the red vestments that are worn as the color symbolizing the Holy Spirit, whose wisdom we implore to guide the work and decisions of our legal professionals and government officials in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government at the federal, state and local levels.

There is a great scene toward the end of the epic movie, "A Man for All Seasons," about the martyrdom of Saint Thomas More, the patron saint of lawyers and politicians. The scene is the trial of the former Chancellor, who is being tried for treason for his refusal to swear to the Act recognizing King Henry VIII as the supreme head of the Church of England. An unsavory character named Sir Richard Rich is called as a witness, and

perjures himself by fabricating a story falsely claiming under oath that he had heard More make some self-incriminating statements. More knows that he has been doomed to death by Rich's perjury. As Rich starts to leave the witness stand, More says that he has a question to ask the witness. More turns to Rich and says, "That's a chain of office that you're wearing. May I see it?" He examines the medallion and asks, "What's this?" Cromwell answers, "Sir Richard is appointed Attorney-General of Wales." Sir Thomas More looks into Sir Richard Rich's face with pain and amusement, and says, "Why, Richard, it profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world . . . But, for Wales?"

Of course, Thomas More is paraphrasing from the scriptural passage found in all three Synoptic Gospels of Matthew (16:26), Mark (8:36) and Luke (9:25), where Jesus asks his disciples, "What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life in the process?" Our passage from today's Gospel reading comes from the preceding chapter of St. Mark and anticipates this question by going to the very heart of the matter of what is necessary for salvation.

Fundamentally, human beings don't do evil because something in the world makes them bad. The evil begins inside each person and arises from

our disordered desires. When we consent to these impulses they defile us. What are we to do if evil arises from inside us? The answer is the New Law of the Gospel which reforms our hearts by the grace of the law of love.

In our first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses tells the Chosen People that they have two great gifts that other nations do not have. One is that God is close to them so they can call upon him whenever they wish and he will listen to them. The other is that they have the Ten Commandments, God's own revealed law. To be close to God and to observe the Divine Law is the basis of a happy life. This is why the Chosen People will be wise and intelligent if they live the covenant. The whole world will see how blessed they are if they do.

The Responsorial Psalm from Psalm 15 is a sketch of a person who lives the virtue of justice. If everyone lived the virtue of justice, the world would be a much different place. Observance of the Law brings life. It is up to each one of us if we want to be just men and women who live according to the truth. We know, as Christians, that it is very difficult to live just lives on our own because of our disordered desires due to original sin. But thankfully, because of the Sacraments, we can have the grace to overcome sin and live positively good lives.

The Church sees the Old Testament Law as “holy, spiritual, and good, yet still imperfect.” The Old Law is like a tutor who can point out to his student what to do but who does not have the power to have him do it. The Mosaic Law teaches us what we should do, but it does not in itself give us the power to overcome our own tendency to sin (CCC 1963). The New Law fulfills the Old Law. As the law of charity (CCC 1966), it is “the perfection here on earth of the divine law, natural and revealed,” accomplished by Christ and the Holy Spirit (CCC 1965). It shows that the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament is the kingdom of God (CCC 1967). It extends the exterior law to the interior of the person and provides the means to reform the heart (CCC 1968). “The New Law is called a law of love because it makes us act out of the love infused by the Holy Spirit, rather than from fear; a law of grace, because it confers the strength of grace to act, by means of faith and the sacraments; a law of freedom, because it sets us free from the ritual and juridical observances of the Old Law, inclines us to act spontaneously by the prompting of charity and, finally, lets us pass from the condition of a servant who ‘does not know what his master is doing’ to that of a friend of Christ . . . or even to the status of son and heir.” (CCC 1972).

The law of charity rules and directs all other commands. The law of love is to will the good of the other. This includes willing our own good by not doing evil. The law of love wants to reform our heart or interior dispositions and gives us the grace or power to do so. On our part, it requires our cooperation and effort. This calls for some soul searching. What is the state of my interior dispositions, from which arise all my conduct? Do I simply do what I want? In other words, am I selfish? Am I a divided soul, partly doing God's will, partly serving myself? Do I act out of fear: of God or of parents or of some other authority? Do I want what God wants? This is the making of a saint. Do I at least want to want what God wants? This is a good beginning. The law of love is a daily struggle or a multi-times-a-day struggle. Jesus Christ gives each of us an everyday hope. Our Lord will help you and me right now, despite our weakness, the weakness of not wanting to do what he wants.

The Letter of Saint James in our second reading today makes two important points: He teaches the importance of faith in action, and he defines what true devotion is. One of the reasons why I went to law school was to help the poor through my actions, not just through my words from the pulpit. As Saint James said, "Be doers of the word and not hearers

only." We all need to look at our everyday lives and ask if we are "doers of the word and not hearers only." The test of true devotion is how we live out the word of God that we hear. By putting our words and good intentions into action, through God's grace we can indeed reach the highest aspiration of our souls, for the "The Law of the Heart is Love."

May God give us this grace. Amen.