



**Most Reverend Robert W. Finn**  
**Bishop**  
**Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph**

**Homily for the Red Mass**

Our Lady of Perpetual Help '*Redemptorist*' Parish  
Kansas City, Missouri  
September 19, 2008

Gospel: MT 16: 24-27 (VR – 866)

Dear Friends in Christ,

Thank you for gathering with me and Archbishop Naumann for this celebration of the Red Mass, a solemn Mass invoking the Holy Spirit and in which we mark the opening of the judicial year. I again want to acknowledge and welcome an expanded group this year as Kansas City hosts the annual meeting of the Missouri Bar and the Missouri Judicial Conference. Today we pray for the guidance and strength of God during the coming term of Court.

The exercise of your office is and must be an expression of your ultimate vocation to holiness in the world. We come as integral persons. We dare not try to put aside the totality of our human experience in applying the law, lest we forget the law's purpose: the well being of the human person and his just and right relationship with all other persons.

For us, as people of faith, the right ordering of these human relationships assumes and rests also on the primary relationship we have as children of God. Each and every one of us has this dignity and value precisely because we have been made in God's image, we are redeemed by the Blood of Christ, and destined in accord with His plan to live for all eternity in heaven.

Several of these fundamental principles are acknowledged in our Constitution and they provide a vital starting point for the whole construct of rights and obligations. The framers of these foundational documents were people of faith. Their reliance on faith provided a livable framework for good law, because Judeo-Christian faith and its values are not peripheral to human experience. They are in continuity with the Natural Law. God's revealed truth and an authentic human experience of truth are never contradictory.

So how does the judge, lawyer, or legislator fulfill his or her sworn charge and at the same time respond to Jesus Christ as a faith-filled person? We have to find a way to live the Christian call to holiness in the course of our everyday responsibilities. It can and must be done. We must find a path to heaven in the law office, the courtroom, and the legislative hall, and we can.

The Gospel today reminds us in clear and strong terms that we cannot live divided lives. We cannot live: part of us for God; part of us directed to some contrary ultimate gain. “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”

We are citizens of the world, of our country, state, and community, and we must seek to love others in the crossroads of the world. We are citizens of the Church, wherein we must love God and our neighbor for Christ’s sake. We have families and friends whom we love with a very special closeness. But the truth is this: Each of us has only one heart. With this same one heart we must love God, family, community, and each person we encounter.

With this one heart, and trying to make it each day a more pure and loving heart, our challenge is to turn all the circumstances and events of our life into occasions of loving God and serving the Church with joy and simplicity, bringing our faith and Christ’s love into every effort and challenge.

Dear friends, the world around us and the culture in which we live and act is one in need of Jesus Christ and His transforming grace. It is for this reason that He Himself came among us. He showed us the truth about God and ourselves. He carried in His very person a “New Law” of life and sealed it in His blood. After winning the victory over death, He ascended to heaven commending the continuation of this work to the apostles, to you and me. And for our help He sent the Holy Spirit. Come now, O Holy Spirit!

Whatever our abilities and circumstances we must bring them to bear – in tandem with our Christian faith – on the transformation of the world in Jesus Christ. If we are experts in the law, then we must assure that it best represents and protects the dignity of each person. The bishop must do his part. The priest or pastor must do his part; BUT so also the expert in business, science, journalism, or the law. What we do must be grounded in the larger vocation which is ours: the call to holiness – to be holy men and women working toward heaven.

We mustn't think for a moment that we can accomplish any of this without God, and without fortifying ourselves through prayer, constant conversion, and the help of the sacraments, particularly this Holy Sacrifice of the Mass around which we gather. We need also the counsel of the Church in her authentic Magisterium.

In 2004, (January, 2004, in Boston) Cardinal Sean O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston reflected on the debacle under which his state continues to suffer – namely the deterioration of the natural and moral state of marriage under the fraudulent legal equivalency of same sex unions. He used the image and example of Sir Thomas More, who went to his death, in 1535, for his refusal to acknowledge, by signed oath, the legitimacy of King Henry VIII's divorce. St. Thomas More is for us, the Cardinal noted, a "martyr" for the sanctity of marriage and he epitomizes the kind of heroic sacrifice any of us may have to make – though perhaps on a smaller scale - when, as people of integrity, we determine to oppose peaceably an intrinsically unjust law. More is for Catholic lawyers, therefore, a patron, model, and intercessor.

Determining to uphold the law and the service of the King, More nonetheless could not part from his resolve to retain his conscience. His was not a frivolous conscience made up of merely subjective inclinations, feelings, or intuitions about what "seems right." Rather, for him as a Catholic – as for us – it rested firmly on the promise of the Holy Spirit our Lord made on the night before He died. To the Church, through the Apostles, he gave his pledge of the Holy Spirit, the Counselor. "He will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you." (Jn 14: 25). You, too, bear the name "Counselor," and you must take seriously your responsibility to conform your prudent direction in consonance with the One Eternal Truth and the dignity of the human person, well-defined by the Church.

We must ask ourselves whether we still believe that the Holy Spirit is entrusted to the Church, or not. When, for example, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states so clearly that human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception, (CCC, no. 2270), and when it affirms the grave moral evil of every abortion as our teaching from the very first Christian century, (CCC, no. 2271) how is it that twice within a month, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops found itself needing to correct Catholic elected officials for publicly expressing contorted interpretations of this clear teaching in justification of their support of abortion?

Locally, we ought not to underestimate the significance of the integrity of the “Catholic position” on the life issues – whether it is in regard to human embryonic stem cell research in Missouri, or the regulation of abortion mills in Kansas.

When these issues are engaging the life and death of so many human persons, they are clearly not matters of partisan politics. They are much more. They are matters of the eternal salvation of souls. And there is absolutely no text from the Second Vatican Council which defines “right conscience” apart from the established moral teaching of the Church.

In a moving citation from his trial, Thomas More shows his clear determination to seek, not the dissolution of his enemies, but to exercise a constant prayerful diligence for their conversion and salvation. More was read the order of his execution: that he was to be dragged through the streets of London, hung up, disemboweled, and cut into pieces.

In response, Thomas makes no protest but expresses a fond hope for his accusers. He draws upon the image of the martyr St. Stephen and the converted St. Paul: “More have I not to say, my Lords, but that like us, the blessed Apostle St. Paul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, was present and consented to the death of St. Stephen, and kept their cloaks that stoned him to death. And yet, be they now both holy Saints in heaven, and shall continue there friends forever. So I verily trust, and shall therefore heartily pray, that though your Lordships have now on earth been judges to my condemnation, we may hereafter in heaven merrily all meet together, to our everlasting salvation, and thus I desire Almighty God to preserve and defend the King’s majesty, and to send him good counsel.” (Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More*. Anchor: New York, 1998. c. 32; p. 398)

This integrity is a heroic yet worthy model for our life. Jesus Christ told us that we would be challenged by the world, as He was. In fact, He promised us the Cross, and told us many times in the Gospel that, unless we take up the Cross and follow Him we can not be His disciples. We cannot bear the Cross without the gift of fortitude that comes from being united to Him. Come Holy Spirit!

I am happy to gather with you to pray for the light and gift of the Holy Spirit. There is a great work of justice to be accomplished. The decisions are difficult and we need Wisdom. The cir-

cumstances can be discouraging and we need the Hope of the Gospel. The path is narrow that leads to life. Lord, keep us on the right path.

St. Thomas More, pray for us. Mary, seat of Wisdom and Spouse of the Holy Spirit, pray for us.