

Red Mass
St. Thomas More Church; Kansas City, Missouri
October 6, 2023

I

Tradition of the Red Mass

The tradition of the Red Mass goes back to the Middle Ages in Europe where the entire legal community would attend Mass each fall before the beginning of a new judicial year.

Liturgically, we celebrate a votive Mass of the Holy Spirit asking the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity to give an abundance of His gifts – wisdom, knowledge, right judgment, understanding, fortitude – to legislators charged with enacting laws, to judges charged with interpreting laws and the constitution, to the President and Governors and other members of the Executive Branch charged with implementing laws, to all lawyers that they represent their clients with integrity and competency, and to all of the support staff who assist legislators, judges, executives, and members of the legal profession in their responsibilities.

In our Gospel this evening from St. John, Jesus describes God the Father sending His disciples an Advocate – the Holy Spirit. Are not attorneys advocates for their clients? The Holy Spirit is an Attorney for the disciples. A good attorney is able to make the Truth evident and apparent.

It has become popularly known as the Red Mass because the liturgical color for the Holy Spirit is red, reminding us of the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost as tongues of fire.

II

Thomas More: Patron of Lawyers and Statesman

We celebrate this year's Red Mass in this Church that has as its patron St. Thomas More, who is also the patron saint for statesmen and lawyers. Thomas More was considered a legal genius. He served as a judge and was renowned for his fairness and integrity. As Chancellor of England, he held the highest governmental office, short of being part of the royalty.

Thomas More was part of the intellectual elite, not just in England, but throughout Europe. He was a talented author and a great conversationalist, who was famous for his wit and humor. Gerard Wegemer, in his biography of More entitled: ***Thomas More: A Portrait of Courage***, relates that the King wanted More to have dinner with him at the Court so frequently, it was intruding on More's time with his own family. More's solution to this problem was to be intentionally boring so that the King did not invite him nearly as frequently to dinner.

Thomas More was a loving Father to his own children. He took a personal interest in their education. He said at one point that if his professional life intruded on his ability to be involved with his children's education, he would quit his law practice. More was an internationally respected scholar. In a time when women were not given comparable educational opportunities to men, Thomas More personally made certain that his daughters were well-educated.

More's children were multilingual and well versed in the humanities. However, More stressed most emphatically in his children's education that they were well formed spiritually as well as in the acquisition and the practice of the virtues. He wanted his children not only to be knowledgeable but even more that they become wise and even more holy.

Thomas More is a great model for the modern attorney to make family a greater priority than professional achievement and acclaim; to be devoted husbands and fathers or devoted wives and mothers before success in the courtroom or boardroom. More was also known for his capacity for friendship. In a profession that can be very demanding, More models the right priorities and balance for today's lawyer.

Above even family, Thomas More's first priority was his relationship with God. His estate at Chelsea included a personal chapel where he spent time in daily prayer. Thomas More took to heart the beauty and power of our first reading from Paul's letter to the Romans that eloquently describes the depth of God's love for us. Jesus gave His life for us on Calvary not because we are perfect. Jesus died for us well aware of our weakness and sinfulness. Our Catholic Faith is not about self-perfection but being transformed by our experience of God's merciful and unconditional love.

Eventually, Thomas More lost the King's favor because of his refusal to support the King in disposing Catherine as his wife and accommodating the King's lust for Ann Boleyn. Most importantly, Thomas More refused to support the King's usurpation of Church authority by declaring himself the Head of the Church in England.

More died a martyr's death, maintaining that he died the King's good servant, but God's first. Another reason we wear Red is to honor this amazing martyr saint!

III

Faith and the Public Square

Religious Faith has an important part to play in the public square in our country. Democracy only works if we have not only virtuous leaders, but also virtuous citizens. Our Catholic Faith is all about forming men and women in virtue – to seek not only their own self-interests but also the common good. The Church fosters within the hearts of believers a desire to serve, combined with a special compassion for the poor, the weak and vulnerable.

To this point, the late Justice Antonin Scalia, in a speech he gave on the importance of character in public service, said: **“If I may advert to the Founding Fathers again: one of the reasons that generation of Americans was so great, one the reasons they got the republic off to such a fine start, is that they were constantly emphasizing the importance of character and of virtue – not only for the individual, but for the society at large. In George Washington’s Farewell Address, you may recall, he called religion and morality two *great pillars of human happiness*, which were indispensable to *private and public felicity*. Pretty preachy stuff. Can you imagine a modern American President, when leaving office, speaking of such moral matters?”**

IV

The Holy Spirit and Civility

Sadly, the civility of our public discourse in recent years has coarsened greatly. It is a tragic development for our nation that it has become rare for individuals to be able to disagree by disputing the ideas of one's opponent instead of attacking the person.

It is much easier to try to defame another person's reputation than to engage their ideas. This is not just the problem of politicians, but voters who reward negative ads and *ad hominem* attacks.

I was edified by late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's *Forward* to a book of a collection of speeches by her colleague, Justice Antonin Scalia. There are probably not two people in public life that had more divergent views of the Constitution and the Law, but despite this reality, they maintained a warm and genuine friendship.

In concluding *The Forward*, Justice Ginsburg stated: **“This collection of speeches and writings captures the mind, heart, and faith of a Justice who has left an indelible stamp on the Supreme Court’s jurisprudence and on the teaching and the practice of the law. The work of his [Scalia’s] fine hand will both inspire and challenge legions of judges and advocates. If our friendship encourages to appreciate that some very good people have ideas with which we disagree, and that, despite differences, people of goodwill can pull together for the well-being of the institutions we serve and our country, I will be overjoyed, as I am confident Justice Scalia would be.”**

V

The Miracle of Dobbs

The U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the Dobbs case more than a year ago was the fruit of the tenacity and perseverance of Pro-Life advocates. I have been in a leadership position in the Church's Respect Life efforts for 40 years.

Immediately after the Roe vs. Wade decision in 1973, there was hope to correct the error of the Court by the passage of a constitutional amendment. Our Founders purposefully made it difficult to amend the Constitution. Unable to amend the Constitution, the Pro-Life movement began an incremental effort to achieve more modest victories, e.g. to prevent funding of abortion, banning partial-birth abortion, parental consent requirements, and informed consent for women. Since the Court had created the problem, it seemed reasonable to focus efforts on changing the Court.

After five decades of determined effort, in June 2022, a majority of the Court overturned Roe vs. Wade. In the majority opinion, Justice Samuel Alito brilliantly exposed the judicial fallacies of Roe and opened the door for State legislatures and the Congress to determine abortion public policy. For Pro-Lifers, this was the equivalent of the Berlin Wall coming down and the ensuing collapse of the Soviet Union. Something that many of us never thought we would see suddenly happened!

VI

Kansas Lesson – No Time to Lower our Prayer Arms

However, as we quickly experienced in Kansas, the overturning of Roe did not mean the cultural battle over abortion was concluded. The Dobbs decision poked the Devil in the eye. Satan’s response has been ferocious.

As fate would have it in Kansas, we were in the midst of attempting to correct by State constitutional amendment a horrific ruling by the Kansas Supreme Court that claimed to have discovered a right to abortion in the Kansas Constitution. With the national media spewing misinformation about the consequences of Dobbs, claiming women would not receive care for ectopic pregnancies or miscarriages, with millions of dollars from the abortion industry and their allies pouring into Kansas, with a secular media not fact-checking the accuracy of the pro-abortion messaging but instead amplifying the misinformation, Kansas felt the effect of the post Dobbs pro-abortion tsunami. We did not just lose, but we were defeated by a startling margin.

VII

Pro-Life Counter Effort

The Pro-Life response requires an elevation and intensification of our educational, pastoral and advocacy efforts. Most importantly, we must increase the frequency and intensity of our prayer.

Fifty years of legalized abortion has convinced many Americans that we cannot survive without the ability to kill our own children. Millennials have been propagandized in public schools, at universities, by the entertainment industry and by the secular media that abortion – the killing of our own children – is a fundamental right that is essential for a hook-up culture.

The Church and the entire Pro-Life community must expand our educational efforts, making thoughtful and well-reasoned arguments aimed at changing minds, while at the same time appealing to the hearts of our fellow Americans. We must help people recognize all of the victims of abortion, not only the baby in the womb, but the Mother and Father who are emotionally and spiritually scarred by abortion.

In my priestly ministry, I have not encountered a more profound sorrow and suffering than parents who have suffered the death of a child, no matter the age or stage of development of the child. However, with post-abortive parents, you layer on top of that suffering the reality that they chose the death of their child. As Pope Francis characterizes it, abortion is the equivalent of hiring a hit-man to kill a child. The grief and guilt of post-abortive parents is so intense that it can only be healed by God's mercy and grace.

We must defend and increase our support for Pregnancy Resource Centers and Abortion Alternative Services. However, we must simultaneously promote and expand our post-abortion ministries of healing and mercy.

VIII

The Battle for the Soul of our Nation

President Biden speaks about fighting for the soul of our nation. He is right that there is a true battle for the soul of the United States, but sadly, he is on the wrong side. His aggressive and ghoulish abortion promotion policies are a big part of the problem. However, abortion is not the only battle front. There is a best-selling book entitled: ***Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation*** by Sophie Lewis. This book is indicative of a serious conversation that is happening in higher education institutions and beyond.

Through the Courts again, our society has already re-defined marriage. With Gender Theory invading public elementary and secondary schools, children and adolescents are being given puberty blocking drugs without parental knowledge, much less consent, and in some cases even under going mutilating surgeries.

If the current Administration has its way, Catholic Hospitals will be forced to perform abortions and sterilizations or be denied government reimbursement for authentic medical care. If this Administration has free reign, teaching the virtue of chastity and Christian sexual morality will be considered a hate crime.

IX

Thomas More: Advocate of Truth and Defender of Marriage

Robert Bolt, the author of *A Man for All Seasons*, understood Thomas More's fidelity to conscience as making him a "hero to selfhood." From Bolt's secular ideological vantage point, More was not a hero because what he believed was necessarily true. Bolt believed that More is to be admired because he remained true to **HIS** convictions in the face of powerful opposition. Bolt reflects the bias of modernity, namely that there can be conflicting truths. I can have my truth and you can have your truth, even if they contradict each other.

In his recent biographical portrait of Saints John Fisher and Thomas More, Judge Robert J. Conrad gives a very different perspective of Thomas More's adherence to conscience, one that accurately portrays what motivated More.

Conrad describes the mindset of More and Fisher as not *self-confident*, but *Christ confident*. Conrad portrays Fisher and More not as followers of self-will, *"but servants of the one true God who spoke through his Word and his Church. Their strength of conviction was rooted in their shared belief that God was truth and that his Church was a truth-telling institution."*

Their confidence in Christ and his Church was not based on a naïve or blind faith. They saw clearly the weakness of many of the individuals who were entrusted with the leadership of the Church. Still, they were confident it was Our Lord's Church. No matter the frailty of some of its leaders, More and Fisher were confident that Jesus would not abandon His Church. Conrad asserts: *"The centrality of conscience is not located in the supreme self but rather in submission to eternal truth."*

X

More, A Man of Prayer

Thomas More, as a young man, had spent some time discerning the possibility of a religious vocation at a Carthusian Monastery. Throughout his life, More kept a very disciplined prayer life that was the foundation for his wisdom and virtue. He also made certain that his family and household observed a well ordered prayer routine. They prayed several psalms daily as part of their morning and evening prayer. For meal prayers, one of the children always read a passage of scripture with a brief reflection on its meaning.

When imprisoned in the tower for failing to take the oath declaring King Henry the head of the Church in England, Thomas More was grateful to the King for providing him this time of prayer and asceticism. More's Faith and life of prayer allowed him to approach his execution with serenity and even humor. He did not see his execution as a defeat, but a final and powerful opportunity to witness to His Faith in the Risen Jesus, who had defeated both sin and death.

XI

A Man for All Seasons and Times

When I was in college, I went to bed many nights listening to a cassette tape (now I am revealing my age) of the final scene of ***A Man for All Seasons***.

After being falsely convicted of treason and sentenced to death, Thomas More eloquently articulates the rationale for his refusal to take an oath that not only proclaimed Anne Boleyn as Queen of England, but bestowed upon the King the title Head of the Church. More declares the Act of Supremacy to be contrary to the Magna Carta and English law that guaranteed religious freedom but, more importantly, a violation of the authority of the Church as instituted by Jesus. It was one of the most powerful closing arguments ever given in a courtroom.

I listened over and over again to More's courageous defense of marriage and the Church, hoping that somehow I could absorb the Saint's wisdom and virtue. Indeed, Thomas More is ***A Man for all Seasons and Times***. He witnessed to the truth even when it cost him position, prestige, financial security, personal freedom and, eventually, his life in this world.

As we face attacks on marriage, the family, the sanctity of life, the Church and her moral teaching in our own time, let us beseech this Saint for all Seasons to pray for us until in his words, ***“we merrily meet in heaven.”***

Thus, we pray: Come Holy Spirit, come and enkindle in our hearts the fire of your love so that we can help build a Culture of Life and a Civilization of Love where every human life is respected and treasured as one made in your own Divine Image and one so precious that the Son of God gave His life on Calvary. Amen.

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