

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FOR THE 39TH ANNUAL RED MASS
OUR LADY OF THE ANGELS CATHEDRAL
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My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy's Father's personal representative to the United States, I greet you in the name of Pope Francis, and I express his spiritual closeness and paternal affection to all of you as we celebrate this Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit at this 39th Annual Red Mass in Los Angeles. I greet Archbishop José Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles and President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. I wish to thank Mr. Vince Farhart, Chairman of the Board of the Thomas More Society of Los Angeles, for his invitation to be with you this evening. I greet the members of the Judiciary, as well as civic officials, lawyers, clerks, and all engaged in the field of law and justice.

In our First Reading, we heard from the Prophet Isaiah who, writing to those in exile, promised that a new king would arise, who would *judge the poor with justice*, rather than by hearsay or mere appearances, and who would *decide aright for the afflicted of the land*. Here we have a glimpse of the noble call of those in the legal field – to judge with equity and righteousness rather than by appearances. To judge rightly we must not use merely human standards but also be open to the gifts of the Spirit, which Isaiah names as *wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, knowledge and fear of the Lord*, who helps us to see things in a new light.

I would like to reflect briefly on each of these gifts:

— The first gift is *wisdom*, which enables a person to see how good and great the Lord is. Wisdom cannot be learned in a book. Through experience and the promptings of the Holy Spirit, it is acquired and helps a person to see things more clearly. Furthermore, it fills life with flavor, which so often becomes tasteless under the coldness of the law, so that each of you, endowed with wisdom, is empowered by the Spirit to be “salt of the earth”, adding flavor to the world, helping ourselves and others to be preserved from corruption, and instructing us all to walk in the ways of justice;

— A second gift is the gift of *understanding*, given so that we may understand in depth the word of God and the truth about the human person and his dignity, as well as the truths of faith. Our world is filled with the superficial and ephemeral, lived in soundbites and Tweets, inspired by ideologies rather than the pursuit of understanding and examination of arguments in a meaningful way. God calls you, the members of our judiciary and legal system, to be persons of substance and integrity, willing to engage in public discourse and debate, open to being changed by an encounter with the truth. He calls you further to set an example for the rest of society so that a sense of civility in public discourse may re-emerge.

— The Spirit bestows the gift of *counsel*, which guides to the discovery of God's plan for our lives, for the life of each one of you. God has made each of you for some definite purpose. He has a personal plan for your salvation. He gives you a unique vocation, but each of you must listen to the voice of God to discern it carefully.

This same spirit of counsel must be applied to your deliberations in your work. There your decisions are not merely theoretical but impact real persons – in the flesh. All of us have blind spots and weaknesses. We must rely on the counsel of the Most High, but also on others – on your legal tradition, on the tradition of faith, and, at times, on your colleagues, whose judgment you trust. The weight of your responsibility can become burdensome. Understand that you do not need to do everything on your own. Moses, for example, took counsel from his father-in-law, and it proved to be a wise decision. Teamwork is important, but I advise having God be part of your team. His counsel is always the best!

— The Spirit offers you the gift of *fortitude* or courage in order to overcome the temptations of evil and to do good always, even at the cost of making a sacrifice. It is not always easy to do the right thing – to stand up for the dignity of the person, the needy and the poor, the voiceless members of society. It is not easy to take a stand when there is so much political pressure upon you or when, instead of tolerating differences and searching for solutions through dialogue, the looming threat of being “canceled” strikes fear.

In those moments, we must ask the Spirit of God for strength, mindful of Saint Paul’s words: *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*. In those difficult moments, when you need courage, pray to the Spirit *who comes to the aid of our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought and who intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings*.

— Next comes the gift of *knowledge*, not knowledge in the technical sense, as is taught at so well in law schools, but knowledge in the deepest sense which teaches us to look at creation and find therein the signs and impressions of God, to understand how God speaks in every age and speaks to us personally, and to inspire our daily work with the values of the Gospel.

— Another gift is that of *piety*, which keeps alive in the heart the flame of love for our Father who is in heaven, so as to pray to Him every day with the trust and tenderness of beloved children. Although we gather in a Catholic cathedral, I am sure there are many here of other traditions; we must recognize our common bonds and common humanities. In a society marked by polarization, the gift of piety helps us to not forget the fundamental reality of the world and of life: that God exists. He knows us and invites us to respond to His call to work for justice.

— and finally, the seventh and last gift is *fear of the Lord*. We should not be afraid of God but have a profound respect for Him, His will, and of all those made in His image and likeness. Today too with all the crises that there are in the world, we see how important it is that each person may respect the will of God impressed in our hearts and by which we must live. In a throwaway culture, lamented by the Holy Father, this fear helps us to have reverence, not only for creation, but for man and woman, made in God’s image, and ultimately for the God Himself. This fear of the Lord manifests itself in a desire to do good, to do what is true, to seek the beautiful, and I would add, to be in awe of His marvelous Presence and of His immense love.

This Presence came down to earth and took on Flesh. In our Gospel, Jesus quotes from Isaiah, which he read in the synagogue:

The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly; to heal the brokenhearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord.

Here Jesus uses the passage to explain His mission. Jesus confirmed His identity, for at His baptism the Spirit had descended upon Him (Lk 3:22). His was to be a Spirit-filled Messiah. The passage explains both Jesus' identity and His mission, in which you, as members of the legal community, share.

That mission was to bring glad tidings and to proclaim Good News. His privileged recipients are the poor, the *anawim*. Jesus will extend His ministry beyond the materially poor to those who are spiritually poor. His proclamation is one of liberty (*aphesis*). Isaiah's use of this proclamation of liberty refers back to the liberty associated with a jubilee year in Leviticus (Lev 25:10), during which those who were indebted were set free from their servitude. Jesus' ministry extends not only to those who have material debts but to those who need relief from the "debt" of their sins. His ministry is one of mercy.

Jesus proclaims liberty to those who are captive. He does so through physical healings. For example, He healed Simon's mother-in-law and the woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit for eighteen years (Lk 13:16). He also proclaimed release to the oppressed, or, rather "He sets at liberty those who are oppressed."

Finally, He announces a year of favor. These past two years do not seem like a year of favor. These are tumultuous times, and yet, our world is more in need of prophetic witnesses than ever – witnesses that offer optimism rather than negativity; that offer hope as a remedy for despair; that promise justice to those who are oppressed, whether by poverty, migration, violence, racial injustice or by being dehumanized.

The people need to be free from fear and at liberty to pursue justice and peace. Jesus, the Just Judge, invites you to share in this mission of making our world not only more just but also more merciful. God gives you many gifts – the gifts of the Spirit. With every gift, there comes a task or a responsibility: yours is to ensure liberty and justice for all.