

**HOMILY FOR THE RED MASS  
Bishop Ricardo Ramírez, C.S.B.  
Phoenix, Arizona  
January 14, 2014**

**Thank you, Bishop Olmstead and Bishop Nevarez, for the invitation to preach the Red Mass in the Diocese of Phoenix this year.**

**The Red Mass is a venerable tradition that goes back almost 800 years to the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. Throughout the United States and in other countries this Mass is celebrated to pray for those involved in the crafting of civil law, its interpretation and its observance. In this Mass we pay tribute to you, our lawmakers, judges and lawyers, whose call is to maintain the rule of law in our country according to the highest standards.**

**The color red is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, that source of inspiration and strength, courage and wisdom, spiritual gifts necessary for those in the crafting of just laws.**

**The color red also reminds us of those who shed their blood and died for the cause of justice and principle, such as St. Thomas More, who suffered martyrdom at the hands of King Henry VIII. The legacy of St. Thomas More is what he said as he was led to his death: “I am, the King’s servant, but God’s servant first.”**

**It is interesting that St. Thomas More lived at the same time Nicolo Machiavelli, noted for his ideas promoting the imposition of the will of the strong. In the exercise of governance, for example, anything that will garner and maintain power is acceptable.**

**Today, we need to uphold the witness of St. Thomas More of “acting in truth.” He reminds us that we must not remove objective moral principles and truth from the law making process. Machiavellian strategies do not belong in civil society.**

**Crafting laws that work and that are just is an enormous challenge. Civil governance is not easy. But these days, neither is Church governance. Ask any bishop! You need our prayers, and we need yours.**

**We just finished celebrating Christmas, and with Christmas there can be three frustrations:**

**“Batteries not included”**

**“Some assembly required”**

**“Read the game instructions”**

**Actually, when we are called to perform a task in the service of others, we are given the wherewithal to accomplish this task; we are given “batteries.” For us who are believers we are given the gifts of the spirit, as Isaiah in today’s first reading says. There is the gift of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord.**

**In that same reading, Isaiah shares with us his beautiful and stunning vision for the future reign of God:**

**The Davidic king who is to come will exercise justice, not by appearances, nor by hearsay. He will judge the poor with justice and decide fairly for the land’s afflicted; he will strike the ruthless and shall slay the wicked.**

**When true justice is attained, the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat. The calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. In other words, the harmony of the Garden of Eden will return and everything and everyone will enjoy correct relationships, and there will be peace.**

**Ladies and gentlemen, that is the aim of lawmaking, to make good relationships possible, to bring order out of disorder, and help establish right relationships with God, with each other and with the natural world around us.**

**And yes, some assembly is required. We must build on what has been given to us and strive to make this an even greater nation. The great legacy we Americans enjoy is the rule of law. As we look around the globe, we observe with alarm those countries who do not have the rule of law, and chaos, disorder, plunder, violence and impunity and grave insecurity is the order of the day for these people.**

**We are not proud of many things in this country, but, we can be justly proud of the rule of law that our country observes, and you, lawmakers and others in the world of law, help maintain that way of life.**

**Yes, and we must read the instructions. Your guide in the world of law is a magnificent Constitution and the Bill of Rights. We also have the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as an important reference.**

**In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus pronounces his moral code, calling for conversion, for the love for enemies and concern for the poor. It is interesting that when he finishes his magnificent sermon, Jesus cures a leper-the teacher teaches by his actions, such as the way Pope Francis is going about his papacy.**

**These laws are the foundations of civil law, which conform to the higher laws. When civil laws are not rooted in eternal and natural law, and violate human dignity and create injustices, then those laws must be declared unjust. Martin Luther King Jr. said it this way from the Birmingham Jail: “Any law that degrades human personality is unjust.”**

**As moral leaders, we bishops often challenge lawmakers to observe respect for the dignity of the human person when we ask that laws protect and not destroy human life, when we call for compassion for the poor and the hungry, and when we call for the reform of our immigration laws.**

**The Catholic bishops of the United States, including those of Arizona and New Mexico, are unanimous in calling for comprehensive immigration reform. I have seen statistics that show that most Americans favor some kind of immigration reform in order to fix a system that is so dysfunctional.**

**Last fall, the group “Arizona Speaks” held four simultaneous meetings in Tucson, Phoenix, Yuma, and Sedona. Nearly 400 Arizona community leaders representing education, law enforcement, business, religion, health care and social services met. These community leaders called for the Arizona Congressional Delegation, House Speaker John Boehner, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, and President Obama to begin working on immigration reform. These leaders called for all facets of our community to work together to resolve the problems that impact immigration. They said that it is a moral, economic, and civil society imperative that this issue be resolved.**

**The U.S. bishops in no way favor open borders because we believe that every nation needs to protect its sovereignty. We also believe that the weight of civil law should be imposed on those guilty of criminal acts. Our concern is for the unification of families, for those fleeing the real threat of violence and even death, as well as economic reasons, seeking the opportunity to live decent and dignified lives. We want to assist those who seek to contribute to the community, to provide for their children and to live in safety.**

The Bible is very strong on the protection of widows, orphans and strangers, the *gerim*, those living in the promised land but not as citizens. The Hebrew word translates as “strangers,” or “sojourners, or “aliens. Psalm 146 says “The Lord protects the stranger, sustains the orphan and the widow, but thwarts the way of the wicked” (vs. 7-9). In the Mosaic Law, as written in the book of Deuteronomy, God is described as one who has no favorites, accepts no bribes, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and befriends the immigrant, feeding and clothing him. The implications for God’s people follow the text immediately: “So you, too, must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt” (Deut. 10:17-19). The Books of Leviticus and Micah express these same sentiments.

These texts are foundations for the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 25 where he describes who will be saved and who will be condemned: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger, and you welcomed me.” In contrast with those who oppressed or merely neglected the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned, and the stranger.

It is indeed fitting that we have a Mass for you, honorable judges, legislators and lawyers. On the one hand, the Mass is the most powerful prayer that has been given us by the Lord himself. On the other hand, you are to be honored for choosing law and its observance as your profession. It is a noble and high calling, for you have the responsibility to bring order and civility to our society. As you begin another year of service to us, we pray that you will be guided by reason, by truth, and by the guidance of God’s spirit.

We can all make a difference in making this a better world, even though who we are and what we do may seem insignificant and unimportant. I was reminded the other day of

**the adage that says that when a hummingbird flutters its wings, the whole world feels the breeze. So let us all, in that little part of the world in which we live and have our being, keep fluttering our wings!**