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Red Mass: 2009 Homily

Gregory A. Kalscheur S.J.

Boston College Law School, kalscheu@bc.edu

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RED MASS

2009 Homily

GREGORY A. KALSCHUR, S.J.*

INTRODUCTION

Each fall I begin my Civil Procedure course by encouraging my first-year students to keep a couple of questions alive in their hearts as they engage in their study of Civil Procedure. I encourage them to imagine what sort of people they might become as they use the different procedural tools that we are studying, and I urge them to imagine how their use of those legal tools might shape the world in which we are living. My hope really is to get all of us to remember one fundamental question—a question that I think is more important than any of the cases we read, any of the doctrine we learn, or any of the particular legal issues any of us study in law school: who am I becoming as a person as I enter more deeply into the study of the law?¹

We are all here today to ask the Holy Spirit to set our hearts on fire with a passion for the justice of God's reign. The readings we have just heard proclaimed² remind us to keep our hearts open to one crucial question: who are we becoming as people as we live out our vocations as lawyers, judges, and public servants? As we live our lives in the law, are we being faithful to our more fundamental vocation to live out our identity as God's beloved children, called to give flesh to God's love in our world?

A. *Practicing Law with God's Presence: Giving Others a Taste of God's Presence*

The words of the prophet Micah in our first reading remind us that the demands of God's life-giving call to each one of us really can be stated

* Associate Professor of Law, Boston College Law School. The Red Mass Homily was given at Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Detroit, Michigan on September 29, 2009.

1. For further discussion of this theme, see *The Law School Must Embody a Special Culture*, CONVERSATIONS ON JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION 21–23 (Spring 2009); *Conversation in Aid of a "Conspiracy" for Truth: A Candid Discussion about Jesuit Law Schools, Justice, and Engaging the Catholic Intellectual Tradition*, 43 GONZAGA L. REV. 559 (2007–2008); *Catholicism in Public Life: Judges, Legislators, and Voters*, 46 J. CATH. LEGAL STUD. 211, 256–58 (2007); *Ignatian Spirituality and the Life of the Lawyer: Finding God in All Things—Even in the Ordinary Practice of Law*, 46 J. CATH. LEGAL STUD. 7 (2007).

2. *Micah* 6:6–8; *James* 3:13–18; *Matthew* 5:1–16.

very simply: “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”³ The challenge for us is to fulfill those simple requirements in the midst of our increasingly complicated lives. We know that the demands of practicing law in our contemporary legal culture can sometimes separate us from our truest selves. But no matter where we find ourselves, no matter what our practice is like, no matter what sort of public role we hold in our communities, God calls us to “do justice.” Justice here does not mean simply applying the law evenhandedly or giving to each person her due. In the words of the late Jesuit scholar, Walter Burghardt, “justice” as that word is used in the Bible means living in a way that manifests faithfulness to the demands of our relationships.⁴ To “do justice” is to live in a way that first recognizes how much God has done for us. Doing justice demands that we first remember how intimately God loves us and how faithful God has been to each one of us. This remembering then calls us to respond in gratitude with a life that reflects that same faithfulness in all of our own relationships. God’s faithful love for us demands a response of faithfulness to God and to all of God’s beloved children, especially those most in need. To do justice is to be faithful to the gift of all that God has done for each one of us in sharing the gift of his life-giving love with us.

B. Our Call to Civility: Using God’s Gift to Enhance Our Lives in Law

St. James in today’s second reading challenges us to let the gift of wisdom from above give birth in us to works that are characterized by humble gentleness, peaceable purity, and a compliant willingness to yield, without a trace of partiality, inconstancy, or insincerity.⁵ Those are an interesting set of virtues for us lawyers to think about. Some might question whether these fruits of the Spirit are compatible with the zealous advocacy we are called to as lawyers or with the harshly partisan reality of contemporary public life. We might, however, hear the Letter of St. James as an urgent call to us to do what we can to restore civility to our increasingly coarse public discourse. This call to civility has to shape the way we think about the work we do in every dimension of our lives as lawyers, judges, and public servants. We are called to give flesh to the civility that is the gift of God’s Spirit in the midst of our conflicts and disputes. We are called to also give flesh to this gift by the way in which we engage in discovery, negotiate transactions, write briefs, make oral arguments, and interact with one another in court. We witness to the civility that God calls us to when we treat our colleagues and our clients, our adversaries and our political opponents with dignity and respect, and we respond to the Spirit’s gift of wisdom poured into our hearts when we

3. *Micah* 6:8.

4. *See, e.g.*, WALTER J. BURGHARDT, S.J., *JUSTICE: A GLOBAL ADVENTURE* (2004).

5. *James* 3:13–18.

open our hearts and our minds to the possibility of learning from those with whom we disagree.

This sort of life of public civility, animated by the Spirit's gift of God's life alive in us, is a powerful way of being faithful to our shared vocation to be salt and light for the world. Salt and light are ordinary, everyday things, but Jesus in today's Gospel uses those ordinary, everyday things to call us to extraordinary living in the midst of our everyday lives. Salt adds flavor to the food we eat; light helps us to see. If we are to be faithful to our identity as salt and light, then the salt of our lives—including our lives as lawyers, judges, and public servants—must add flavor to the world; the light of our lives must help people to see the reality of God's love alive in our midst. The salt and light of our lives as lawyers should help all the people we meet to taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

With these very simple images, Jesus is saying one very simple thing to us today: no matter where our lives in the law take us, we must always stay faithful to the truth of who we are as God's beloved sons or daughters. We can do that in ways that are as ordinary as table salt and lamp light. In the midst of our everyday lives as lawyers, God calls us to add the flavor of God's love to all the events of our daily living. By loving kindness and humble companionship in our offices and in our families and communities, we allow the people around us to feel that God is with them through our presence. The people we encounter in our professional lives must see the reality of God's love shining in their midst through the light of God's love shining through our lives.

CONCLUSION

So, what sort of people are we becoming as we enter more deeply into our lives in the law? As we all strive to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God, my prayer is that our lives might reflect the truth expressed in the final lines of a poem by the nineteenth-century Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins:

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his going graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is—
Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of [our] faces.⁶

6. GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS, S.J., *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*, in THE OXFORD AUTHORS: GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS 129 (Catherine Phillips ed., 1986).

May our lives do justice, with humility, gentleness, and civility. May all of our goings be graces. May all those whom we serve taste and see Christ alive in us, lovely in limbs and lovely in eyes not his.