

## **Homily - RED MASS**

Homily by His Grace Patrick C Pinder Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nassau

Delivered at St Francis Xavier Cathedral On the Occasion of the Red Mass

8th January, 2006

Readings : Isaiah 60: 1-6

Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11,12-13

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

Your Lordship, the Chief Justice and your fellow Justices of the Supreme Court, Madam President and Justices of the Court of Appeals; Other Members of the Judiciary; Director of Legal Affairs; President of the Bar Association and Bar Council; Members of the Bar and Legal Profession;

Beloved in Christ:

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to St Francis Xavier Cathedral to celebrate another Red Mass. It is my prayer that this liturgical event will continue as long as Christian worship continues in this country. The equitable administration of justice is so important to the quality of life in our country. We do well, therefore to invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit upon members of the legal profession as the first Court sessions of the New Year begin.

We do so in a season and, indeed, on a feast, which are of great significance to the Church-the season is Christmas and the feast is Epiphany, which remembers the manifestation of the Christ to the nations-as saviour of us all. This most sacred occasion was foreshadowed by the Prophet Isaiah and Psalm 72, from which we draw two of today's readings. These two texts and the other readings hold much instruction for those of us who would be guided by the Holy Scriptures and allow its wisdom and values to infuse and uplift our lives and actions.

The Prophet Isaiah provides an excellent and beautiful illustration of the significance of Christ's coming into the world as Man. It was a divine gift of light to a world enmeshed in darkness, an incarnation of God's ineffable grace:

The Prophet says:

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem !  
Your light has come,  
The glory of the Lord shines upon you.  
See, darkness covers the earth,  
And thick clouds cover the peoples;  
But upon you the Lord shines,  
And over you appears his glory.

Such is the description we borrow from the Prophet Isaiah to assist us in understanding the gift and the mystery we have just celebrated at Christmas.

Now, I ask you, what is to be our attitude in the face of such a gift?

Isaiah intimates that we are to walk by the Lord's light, which is the light of truth. In his letter to the Ephesians, St Paul reveals that he has been given the "stewardship of God's grace". He also makes a point of which every Christian in this nation should take note-That all Christians are "coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." This remains true no matter our national origins, legal, social or economic status, colour or creed.

Psalm 72 provides more information as to the signs of the Lord's presence among us and the promised fruits of the divine presence-fruits that are central to the work of administration of justice. The hallmarks of Christ's kingdom are justice and peace. Leaders and administrators, such as yourselves, are called to reflect them in your practice.

Consequently, you are to cultivate sound judgment and to act with justice and compassion. You are called upon to rescue the poor, hear and respond to the cries of the afflicted and have pity for the lowly. This is the stewardship of his grace to which we are all called. No one is exempt.

This is our mandate as followers of Christ. It is our duty to ensure that the Church or the body of Christ on earth is increasingly unified. We must not, by prejudice, dishonesty, unkindness or ignorance, create a series of dysfunctional, disparate parts that work against each other. It is, in fact, our duty to contribute to the creation of a civil society as a bulwark against conflict and misery. It is our call to reconciliation, which is the very heart and soul of the gospel of our Lord.

Are we succeeding in being a force for reconciliation? I believe that honest reflection will alert Bahamians that we are engaging a societal path that will lead to the deep disorder that we view with fear on the televised news every day.

It has been the custom that the homily for this occasion should revolve around matters relating to the law and the administration of justice. However, I would like to take up a closely related subject that is just as pertinent to the well-being of this country - civility.

Some have pointed out that, certain global hotspots, the Middle East , for example, are plagued by a deeper problem than the mere absence of political and economic development. The underlying problem is one of "disempowered populations and alienated societies." (1) They go on to say that if one is committed to tackling the dangers of extremist ideologies currently in circulation throughout the region, it is necessary to concentrate energies on the vital underlying causes, namely, the absence of a functioning civil society. (2)

It has been said also that "there has been little or no pooling of resources by academics and policy-makers on the issue of Civil Society. and no concerted effort to develop a long-term strategy for addressing the social dimension of the current problems..." (3) Increasingly, all of this is as true for The Bahamas as it is for the Middle East .

While "civil society" has become a buzz phrase for speakers in The Bahamas today, to what extent do we internalize the seriousness of its presence or its absence? If we do take it seriously, what is being done about creating and maintaining the drivers of civil society?

It has been noted that there are two guiding principles in establishing civility in a society. One of them is that life is a relational experience.

"We do not live in a vacuum. We live among others, we depend on others, and we seek comfort and life-meaning in others. Our very individual identities, sanity, and health are shaped by the presence of others in our lives. The quality of our lives depends, to a large extent, on the quality of our relationships." (4) It seems to me, then, that it makes sense to acquire relational competence. It makes sense to find ways of becoming good at being with others and being good for each other. The rules of civility and good manners give us a basic, time-proven way of getting along together.

Civility is intimately bound up in the creation and sustaining of communities for collective and individual benefit and well being. It is not about antiquated codes of etiquette. It's not about knowing which items of cutlery to use. It's not about knowing that you shouldn't drink from the finger bowls at a fancy dinner table. Civility speaks to a larger social dialogue, about ethical behaviour, about neighbourliness, about good citizenship and respect for persons-and also for the rules and regulations that are established for protecting and enhancing the life of the community.

How often would you say that you practiced civility or had it shown to you over the course of season that should have brought "Joy to the World"? How many took the time to reflect on the true significance of the season rather than worry about a good parking spot in the Mall? How many took time to speak a few kind words to busy store clerks rather than add to their harassment? How many gave thought to helping to satisfy the needs of the needy rather than buy one more expensive gift to impress someone who wouldn't have suffered without it?

It has been said that civility and manners are kinds of goodness, and as we act ethically, we transcend our Selves, but we also nurture our Selves." (5) I will go further and say that true civility is a product of the truest relationship that we can know-namely, our bond with Christ. We are not born with the forms of civility that are life giving and life affirming; they are the fruits of the Epiphany, the fruits of our salvation, the fruits of our relationship with our Saviour.

Civility is surely one of the talents given in the Parable of the Talents. It is given to all who enter into a relationship with Christ but, like the talents of the parable, the gift will be treated in different ways-some beneficial and some counterproductive. Your talent can be invested, nurtured

and multiplied or it can be hidden and wasted away. We must practice good citizenship and neighbourliness daily, if we are to be effective in improving our lives and the lives of others. I want to stress today that in your profession you are well situated to offer good example in this regard.

We must be followers of Christ every day, in every waking moment-not only during Sunday Mass, but in observing traffic signals and refraining from road rage, driving drunk and from the petty larcenies that have become smilingly acceptable in this society. The fruits of our civility, our sense of community and love of Christ must be ever evident in our treatment of those who love us and those who don't. It must be evident in our respect for the rule of law and the common and national good.

What more specifically should be the hallmarks of civility in members of the judiciary? The first must be that you serve the common good and not merely your personal agendas, or private prejudices. This means that the young man who espouses the hip-hop lifestyle, or the financially strapped single mother from over the hill should be afforded no less justice and compassion than the child of a friend or individuals of high net worth.

I continue to believe that social and restorative justice should be the primary motives in the enforcement of law and the administration of justice. We cannot continue to leave so many of our young men and women to be lost to prison terms that don't do enough to reform and restore. Too many are foundering in education and training programmes that increasingly exhibit a poor fit with the demands of institutions of higher education and job opportunities. We have to find out why domestic abuse and school violence are escalating to the great harm of Bahamian women and children. We have to find out why so many of our youth are abandoning the faith of their mothers and fathers. We cannot say we're followers of Christ and turn our backs on the challenges of our lives together-our community life.

And again I say that the path of hope is to be engaged through concerted action involving every element of civil society. I continue to believe that they are only possible when the Constitution, law enforcement, the judiciary, the legal profession, the educational system, the social services and, most certainly, the Church function harmoniously. The Catholic Archdiocese looks forward to continuing its partnership in this regard in 2006 and beyond.

However, here at the beginning of a new year, in this new century, we Bahamians have the opportunity and the obligation to widen our view, to set our sights on a goal higher than the mere absence of conflict on the individual, parochial or national level. I would like to share with you what Pope Benedict XVI noted in this regard in his recent message for World Peace Day. He says:

"Whenever there is a loss of fidelity to the transcendent order, and a loss of respect for that "grammar" of dialogue which is the universal moral law written on human hearts, whenever the integral development of the person and the protection of his fundamental rights are hindered or denied, whenever countless people are forced to endure intolerable injustices and inequalities, how can we hope that the good of peace will be realized?" (6)

I would like to close with the Holy Father's definition of the peace we must seek, which is the foundation of our life as a community and which accords perfectly with the readings from the Scriptures with which we began:

"We must realize that peace cannot be reduced to the simple absence of armed conflict, but needs to be understood as "the fruit of an order which has been planted in human society by its divine Founder", an order "which must be brought about by humanity in its thirst for ever more perfect justice". As the result of an order planned and willed by the love of God, peace has an intrinsic and invincible truth of its own, and corresponds "to an irrepressible yearning and hope dwelling within us".

"Seen in this way, peace appears as a heavenly gift and a divine grace which demands at every level the exercise of the highest responsibility: that of conforming human history-in truth, justice, freedom and love-to the divine order. (7)

Dear friends, civility is the key to sustaining ordered and rewarding life in this country and the judiciary has a major role to play in upholding civility.

May God bless and prosper all the good work you will, in this regard, throughout this new year.

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