

**Homily by the Most Reverend Patrick C. Pinder, STD, CMG
Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Nassau
on the Occasion of the Red Mass
at St. Francis Xavier Cathedral
Nassau, Bahamas**

Sunday, January 10th, 2010

Readings

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

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; Attorney General, 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 all to this cathedral to celebrate the Red Mass once again. As members of the legal profession and the judiciary, you bear a special privilege and responsibility as guardians of public order and peace. In this capacity, yours is a heavy task at any time but especially in these challenging times. It is fitting then that we gather at the start of this New Year to invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit on you and on your professional efforts.

If you seek the wisdom and the strength sufficient for the demands of your calling, you will find it in the Word of God. If we allow that Word to inform us, we can be assured that this solace is ours by grace. The Prophet Isaiah confirms

it: "I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice." (Isaiah 42:6) He announces.

You have heard these words before. In troubled times when our faith tends to be most vulnerable, some may ask, "Is this true?" In answer, I say the word of God is eternally true and stands forever.

On our Liturgical Calendar, which is the schedule according to which we arrange our worship throughout the year, today is the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This is the day we conclude our celebration of the Christmas Season. At the start of this season we heard some very memorable words from the prophet Isaiah. He announced that: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom, a light has shone." (Isaiah 9:1ff)

The darkness which visits us may take any number of forms. As we look back on 2009, our first glance reveals a sad catalogue of criminality. The very worst of all is the despoiling of the most precious gift of God to each of us – the gift of life, a gift to be treasured and brought to its greatest light. Yet, in this small community of ours, with a country-wide population that would only constitute a small city in some nations, we have had more than 80 homicides.

What has gone wrong? Are we not getting the formula for peace and social order right? How can this be when we proudly declare, loudly and often, that we are a Christian nation, living by the Word?

For many the solution is simple. It is the law of retribution: like for like, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth and a life for a life. Over the years my predecessor and I have urged us all not to follow this path. The splendor and dignity of our

Christian vocation challenges us to think more deeply and to act more mercifully.

Seeking the true causes and effective solutions to the challenge of violent crime in our midst is essential. Trading blame is largely useless.

The matter is not simple, however. Indeed, the darkness, to which Isaiah made reference, can find its way into your esteemed profession. We see it in those of your colleagues who do not live up to their high calling. This past year we witnessed the reports in the newspapers, the allegations of malfeasance and the charges brought against a number of your peers. For some, it may have been a form of dereliction of responsibility. For others of your colleagues, it has been no less than flagrant criminality.

Of course, the shadow of darkness does not begin or end with your profession. Absolutely not! Neither is the religious community exempt. Many who purport to be ministers of the Gospel have provided less than worthy role models. The net result of this is always scandal in the original sense of the word. That is, a stumbling block for others on their spiritual journey. It may even cause some to lose their way spiritually and discount the way of the Lord as a path to peace.

The family, the building block of community life, has itself not escaped the reach of darkness of which Isaiah spoke. Crumbling family life is more and more spoken of as a major source of societal rupture. And with justification! In pursuit of material wealth, professional, political and social advancement, how many men and women have not neglected their homes, spouses and children?

Are we not observing an ever-increasing number of neglected, abused, hostile, undisciplined and angry children? Parental authority is certainly not what it

used to be. It is no surprise then that respect for authority in general is at an all-time low.

Ours is the age of Reality TV which some say celebrates self-indulgence and conflict. One could go so far as to say the media and the world of entertainment are more and more rewarding deceit especially when you consider the recent saga of the "Balloon Boy."

No doubt we each have stories to tell which illustrate how rude behavior is becoming the norm rather than the exception.

A huge challenge for us remains our young men. Among young men anger and violence have become the essential response to even minor disagreements and imagined slights. It has become the way to define manhood and to avoid having your masculinity called into question.

Young woman are equally challenged to prove their womanhood. For many it is through early maternity and for a growing number, it is in answering conflict with violence like their brothers do.

Such is but a glimpse of the reality we find ourselves challenged by - the distortion of values, lack of socialization, a failure to take responsibility, a failure of accountability. It would seem as if the world is losing its grip on the proper center of human life and dignity. We are letting go of the light of the world and stumbling into darkness.

Is there a solution? Just how does a community respond to a rise in crime or any societal plague? I suggest that we must do so in a reasoned, civil, mature, indeed, Christian way. Isaiah said: "the people who walked in darkness have

seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.” His is a message of hope and it is with an attitude indeed a reserve of hope that we must face the challenge before us. The challenge before us is nothing less than community building. It is nothing less than the continuing, ongoing, demanding task of nation-building.

In Christmas we celebrate the Incarnation. That is the foundational belief we hold that, in Christ, God assumed human flesh. In so doing He has given each person, each family, each community a dignity beyond measure. Out of respect for that dignity we must build our community. This is a task which calls for partnership and solidarity across every boundary which divides us. Surely it is a task worth doing and any task worth doing is the work of generations ... not a short-term, half-hearted, on-again off-again effort, but the work and commitment of generations. And our generation must rise to the challenge.

The effort in facing the current social challenges before us should not be seen as a task for the public sector alone. There must be participation of what we call Civil Society. “Civil Society is described as the bedrock of democracy, the glue that holds society together. It is neither public (state) nor private (economic) but made up of what are often called ‘voluntary organizations’ – churches, schools, charities, fraternal organizations, residents’ associations ... and so on. These are what our tradition of social thought calls ‘mediating institutions.’ The dynamic behind these organizations is not profit; nor are they paid for by the taxpayer. Civil Society is bound together by the power of association, the bonds formed by values and common interests.” Its ambition is to build, affirm and strengthen the common good.

This category of Civil Society embraces both the bar and the church. So let us not be reluctant to be partners in finding and implementing solutions to the social

challenges before us. We in the Catholic community have put our shoulders to this task before and we remain committed to do so still.

As we conclude the season when we celebrate the Incarnation we find the words of Paul to Titus summarizing the significance of this event. This is what it says:

Beloved:

**The grace of God has appeared, saving all
and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires
and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age,
as we await the blessed hope,
the appearance of the glory of our great God
and savior Jesus Christ,
who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness
and to cleanse for himself a people as his own,
eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11-14)**

The remedy for societal ills requires the participation of every sector of society – every man, woman and child, every officer of the law, every judge, every businessperson, every individual, rich or poor. If there is one weak or non-participating link, the chain of healing breaks.

The law has a role to play and civil society has a role to play. If we continue to turn a blind eye to the so-called small infractions, the incidents of incivility, they will escalate to the truly intolerable crimes. Every time we accept the graffiti on the walls, the discarding of waste in our streets, the despoiling of the environment, the running of red lights, the “little” thefts from the supermarket, the foul language in our streets or defrauding the national revenue, we risk driving incivility into the arms of its big brother crime.

Rebirth is ours for the taking. Titus reminds us, however, that the goodness poured out to us is not to be taken for granted. It is not the result of any merit of ours, but a product of God’s love and mercy:

**When the kindness and generous love
of God our saviour appeared,
not because of any righteous deeds we had done
but because of his mercy,
He saved us through the bath of rebirth
and renewal of the Holy Spirit,
who he richly poured out on us
through Jesus Christ our savior,
so that we might be justified by his grace
and become heirs in hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)**

This is the blessed hope not only for the next life, but the only sure foundation for a livable future in this one.

Sustained by these promises, I encourage you to go forward in courage. Lean on the strength of the Word proclaimed to take the right stand, even though it may be the unpopular one. Have the courage to look below the surface and to get to the root of things. Have the courage to show mercy as we have been shown mercy.

As we come to the beginning of this new legal year, may all your efforts be blessed. Whatever good you do as Judge or advocate, may it reflect your awareness of being called for the “victory of justice”. In this pursuit may you all be guided and graced so as to bring honour to your profession and great benefit to our entire community.