

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Red Mass, Diocese of Fort Worth

Red Mass

Diocese of Fort Worth, Texas

September 28, 2017

Let us suppose that some fine morning you walked into your law office or your chambers, sat down at your desk, began looking at your emails when suddenly the walls began to shake violently, and flames were seen darting about your person. Suppose further that, after this event occurred, you went out on a balcony and began to address passersby down below - shouting in a loud voice the words of the Gospel. I think it's fair to say that, when you came in from the balcony, your colleagues would tiptoe around you and someone would probably call security!

Yet, something not unlike this happened to the Apostles and the Virgin Mary when they were gathered in the Upper Room to pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit came upon the Apostles, they emerged as bold and fearless witnesses to the Good News of Christ's Resurrection and spent the remainder of their lives preaching the Gospel & building up the Church, expending even their lives for the sake of Christ. Listening to this evening's reading from the Acts of Apostles, we were reminded that we too have received the Holy Spirit. In that conviction, born of faith and confirmed by experience, we have gathered for this Red Mass, this Mass of the Holy Spirit, so that you and I, and all those involved in the administration of justice, will indeed welcome the influence of the Holy Spirit more robustly in our lives, ...not only to strengthen and encourage us in the challenges of professional life but also to help us serve the cause of truth, freedom, and the common good. It is no small thing that we pray for.

How is it, then, that you and I have received the Holy Spirit? As we know, the Holy Spirit descended upon us in the Sacrament of Baptism. It was through the action of the Holy Spirit at work in this sacrament that we first shared in God's own life; through Baptism, that we were joined to Christ in his death and resurrection, and became members of His Body, the Church and through Baptism that we received

theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. The Spirit of the Lord was strengthened in us on the day of our Confirmation, a sacrament that imparts a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, like that of Pentecost, whereby the gifts of the Holy Spirit were reinvigorated in our souls; and we were given special strength to bear witness to the Christian faith. So too, the Spirit of the Lord is upon us at every celebration of the Eucharist, for in giving us His Body and Blood, offered as a living sacrifice of praise, the Lord Jesus also gives us an ever deeper share in his Holy Spirit, by which we become “one body, one spirit in Christ” (Eucharistic Prayer III). Let us also not forget that when we pray and seek to discern the Lord’s will, we are also overshadowed by the Holy Spirit who links us to Christ and helps us to do the will of the Father.

Nor is the Holy Spirit given to us merely as our private possession, for the faith that we share is deeply personal but never merely private. Thus, the Spirit, the Advocate whom Jesus promised to send, is indeed imparted to us, just as the Spirit was given to the Apostles, because, like them, in some way, we too are being sent forth into the world to bear courageous witness to the Good News, the Gospel of Life and Salvation.

But how, then, do we bear witness to the Christian faith? How do *you* bear witness to your faith amid the duties of public life? Amid the give and take of litigation and tragic criminal cases? Amid the technicalities of corporate law, the tax code, wills and estates? Amid the rigors of academic life - teaching, researching, writing, peer reviews? How indeed do you bear witness amid the competing views and values that absorb many of your waking hours? Will you someday stand before your colleagues and preach like the Apostle Peter? Such cannot be excluded but I daresay that most of us simply won’t do that.

So, we do well to take some advice for living and witnessing to our faith from Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, who was beatified in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to Birmingham, England. Newman would advise us to pursue what he called “the apostolate of personal influence”. Now, Newman himself exerted an enormous personal influence in his day and he continues to do so in our day as well. His life spanned most of the 19th century. He lived roughly half his life as an Anglican and the other half as a Roman Catholic. He was a leading intellectual, a

controversialist, an apologist, a poet, and a novelist. He filled some 40 volumes with his works, wrote nearly 20,000 letters, maintained a wide and close circle of friends, and is widely considered to be a forerunner of the Second Vatican Council. And while Newman's witness to the fullness of Christian truth cost him dearly, he brought many to the Church and profoundly influenced the culture of his day. So what is this "apostolate of personal influence" which Newman commends to us?

It has a few important components. First, if our faith has any hope of influencing others, it has to be real, not just notional. What Newman means by this is that our faith is not just a matter of ideas or notions without consequence; rather, it is firmly rooted in the conviction that what we profess is real, true, and good, and utterly consequential, not just for our personal life and destiny, but indeed for the meaning of human life itself and for the destiny of the world. Only a faith that opens us to ultimate truth and to ultimate realities will have any real hope of influencing others. If it's all just a matter of conjecture, then, why bother? Indeed, no one dies for a conclusion, let alone for a private opinion or a flight of fancy! Second, our faith has to be both really real and deeply personal. We've got to keep those two things in tandem. Because the faith is objectively true, it speaks to the deepest longings of our hearts, longings for something beyond us, something at once reliable and transcendent. Newman's motto, "*cor ad cor loquitur*" sums this up: God's heart speaks to our hearts 'words of spirit and life', words of truth and love, which penetrate to our depths, so much so, when they hit home, they cannot be suppressed. The third component of the apostolate of personal influence is this: if our hearts are to speak to the hearts of others, then there must be a distinguishing quality about our lives, an 'undertone of truth', a life of integrity and virtue, rooted in deep convictions about God's design for the world and for our humanity, and illumined by the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). Fourth, the apostolate of personal influence can be exercised only if we prayerfully discern the Lord's will in our lives and ask for guidance in saying the right thing at the right time to any and all whose minds and hearts we hope to open to authentic truth and love.

All of us, I would suspect, like to think of ourselves as influential. All of us have networks of colleagues, friends, and families. We strive to make a difference by what we say and do, by the way we fulfill our responsibilities and offer leadership in our

professions. As St. Paul reminded us, each of us is blessed with the gifts that the Spirit imparts. We are called to employ these special gifts to influence others by our prayerful spirit, by good example, by our wisdom, by our knowledge and love of the faith, and by the contagion of virtue and integrity. Let us not underestimate the power of personal influence!

Bear with me for a few more moments as we ask one more question, and it's this: What is the "content" of our personal witness to others? Is there anything specific we need to say or do so as to move the proverbial needle at this time in our history? There are many good and correct answers to this question - I think of issues such as racial justice, immigration, the role of the family, the need to protect innocent and vulnerable human life . . . and much more.

But allow me to suggest a specific witness which you are equipped to provide as those involved in the law and the administration of justice. I would submit you are well-positioned to urge your colleagues to consider carefully the importance of maintaining religious freedom which is increasingly threatened at home and abroad in this time of our history. These threats here in the United States are not of violence, exile, and death as in so many other parts of the world where religious persecution is rampant. And how we must pray and reach out to these brothers and sisters of ours, many of them Christians, who suffer merely because they profess their faith. By contrast, in our country threats to religious freedom are often more subtle. They are embedded in regulations, policies, court decisions, licensing requirements, accreditation procedures, and sometimes in local ordinances. When religious belief conflicts with emerging social priorities, especially those related to the redefinition of sexuality and marriage, many opinion leaders are quick to condemn religious freedom as a mask for bigotry. In these past years, we have struggled with government mandates that would force churches to violate important moral teachings, such as the so-called contraceptive mandate and in some states, an abortion mandate. As of this date, dear friends, we are still not out of the woods on those issues. And so, in these and other ways, religious freedom truly needs to be protected.

How important that in the daily practice of your faith you strive to influence your colleagues to protect and defend religious freedom, not merely as a private right to

believe and worship as one sees fit, but really as the right of believers to assemble, to organize, and to express their beliefs through public ministries that serve the common good, thus to bring faith into the public square, thus to manifest faith by works of education, health care, and charity.

May the Holy Spirit abide with us now and every day of your lives, to encourage us, to guide us, to console us - but also to send us forth as witness of authentic human dignity and as builders of a civilization of truth and love. With Bishop Olson, I truly thank you for your witness to the faith and for your spirit of service to both Church and State, even as I join your bishop in asking God to bless you and keep you always in his love. God bless you and thanks for listening!