

**Homily – Annual Red Mass
October 14, 2021
San Fernando Cathedral**

Then an argument broke out among them about which of them should be regarded as the greatest. He said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as ‘benefactors,’ but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant... I am among you as one who serves.”

Luke 22: 24-30

My dear brothers and sisters, the purpose of the Red Mass is clear enough: it invokes God’s guidance and strength during the court term to come. Our wearing of the liturgical red signifies a willingness to defend the truth inspired by the Holy Spirit, even to the shedding of one’s blood.

In light of this and God’s word which was just proclaimed to us that as leaders we must be servants, we ask ourselves how then must we be servants of justice? What might God be asking of us at this moment? Is there not a higher commandment than the Lord’s demand in Leviticus: “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19: 18)?

The point is, in our tradition, the justice God asked of Israel was NOT an ethical construct. It did not mean: give to each what is due to each, what each person has a strict right to demand, because he or she is a human being, or have been written into the law. No, justice was a whole web of relationships that stemmed from Israel’s

covenant with God. The Israelites were to father the fatherless and feed the sojourner, the stranger, not because the orphan and the outsider deserve it, but because this is the way God had acted with them.

Justice, for the Jew, was not a question simply of human deserving, of human law. The Jews were to give to others what they had been given by God, were to act toward one another as God had acted toward them -- and precisely because God had acted this way. Their justice was to image not the justice of man, but the justice of God. For Israel the practice of justice was an expression of steadfast love, a demand of steadfast love -- God's love and their own love. Not to execute justice was not to worship God.

This is the tradition that oriented the ministry of Jesus. And, in all he does Jesus teaches us through the words of Scripture that the just man or just woman is not primarily someone who gives another what that other deserves. The just man, the just woman has covenanted with God. This covenant demand that we treat other human persons as God wants them treated in His covenant plan, treat friend and enemy as He treats them. And how does God treat them? He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Mt 5: 45)

And so brothers and sisters, for us the quest for justice as defined by the scripture and the wise among mortals should be a springboard for a fuller life; the love of law should lead to the law of love.

Why? Because, for your personal life, human law is not enough to save you, to make you one with God; only steadfast love of God can do that. And for the nation, although human law may hopefully preserve us from anarchy, it is not enough to bind up our country's wounds.

What, then, does this demand of you? A return to the biblical vision of justice. The justice you must live must be a web of relationships that stem from your covenant with God. Your presence here implies that you have such a covenant. Perhaps not in a religious community, but still a genuine commitment to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the Father of Jesus Christ. In that commitment it is not enough to give to others what they "deserve," what they have earned by their efforts. You are to act towards others as God has acted toward you -- and precisely because God has acted in this way. Your commitment commits you to a style of godlike living where no man or woman is a stranger to God.

In a video message Pope Francis spoke to a group of judges from North and South America and Africa who were meeting in Rome on November 30th this past year. The pope said that the building of social justice is a "collective work that must be achieved on a daily

basis... Working toward true social justice must be done with an attitude of commitment that follows along the path of the good Samaritan and that is mindful of not falling into a culture of indifference.” (CNS - December 1, 2020)

Your commitment to God’s justice makes demands on you. It is not enough to be incorrupt, to go to your people with clean hands; those hands must be outstretched! It is not enough to be learned jurists and skilled practitioners; your people need understanding and love!

By all means, confront your constituents with your competence, inspire them with your integrity. Give them what any man or woman can claim from the law. But give them more. For your salvation and theirs, give them yourselves! Act toward them as God has acted toward you. A fresh, exciting, incredible ideal. No longer “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” but, “Do unto others as God has done unto you.” Who knows you just might transform Texas into the Kingdom of God. May our Mother of Guadalupe protect us as we strive to live the justice of her son Jesus, the Incarnate love of God for each of us!