

MESSE ROUGE - SOCIÉTÉ JURIDIQUE SAINT-THOMAS-MORE
Jeudi de la 29^e semaine du temps ordinaire - 21 octobre 2010
Basilique Cathédrale Notre-Dame, Ottawa, ON
[Textes : Ephésiens 3. 13-21 (Psaume 32 {33}); Luc 12.49-53]

Again this year, it is a joy and honour for me to join in celebrating this Red Mass with members of the St. Thomas More Society and the distinguished public officials who join us this afternoon. Thank you for your public service.

C'est un honneur et une joie pour moi, encore une fois cette année, de présider cette Messe rouge avec les membres de la Société Saint-Thomas More ainsi qu'avec tous ceux et celles qui se joignent à nous cet après-midi. Je vous remercie infiniment pour votre travail, pour votre service public.

This annual Red Mass, whose colour represents the fire of the Holy Spirit given on Pentecost, is a time of prayer, during which we invoke the Holy Spirit of God upon the exercise of law for the common good. It is a powerful and public expression of our belief in the inter-relation between faith and reason in one of the most delicate areas of our common life.

Cette Messe rouge annuelle, dont la couleur représente le feu de l'Esprit Saint donné à la Pentecôte, est une occasion de recueillement et de prière. Nous invoquons l'Esprit Saint et nous lui demandons de bien vouloir se pencher sur l'exercice du droit en vue du bien commun. Cette prière devient alors l'expression puissante et officielle de notre foi dans l'interdépendance entre la foi et raison, et ce, dans un des domaines les plus délicats de la vie commune.

A little over a month ago, on September 17, 2010, John Bercow, the Speaker of the House of Commons—the Mother of all Parliaments—welcomed the Holy Father during his apostolic visit to the United Kingdom to Westminster Hall in London.

Il y a un peu plus d'un mois, le 17 septembre dernier, John Bercow, le président de la Chambre des communes – Mère de tous les parlements – a accueilli le Saint-Père à Westminster Hall, à Londres, lors de sa visite apostolique au Royaume-Uni.

Nearly 500 years earlier on July 1, 1535, in that same hall, John Bercow's predecessor, Thomas More, was condemned to death on the charge of treason because he refused to recognize Henry VIII, the King of England, as the supreme authority over the Church and over the pope.

Alluding to that historical event, Pope Benedict spoke of "*the dilemma which faced More in those difficult times;*" one he suggested was "*the perennial question of the relationship between what is owed to Caesar and what is owed to God.*"

Thomas More was possessed of a quick wit and was held to be not only a statesman of rare abilities but a judge of impeccable integrity as the Lord Chancellor of England. He also put great importance in his good friends and especially his wife, his family, and his Catholic faith.

But the defining characteristic of Thomas More was his conscience. Pope John Paul II, in his *Motu Proprio* proclaiming St. Thomas More the Patron of Statesmen and politicians, said: *“Thomas More witnessed the primacy of truth over power...He died as a martyr because of his passion for truth...for him his moral conscience was a defining voice, the voice of God in his soul.”*

At this Red Mass we pray for lawyers, judges, politicians and others who serve in the legal profession and public office. Let us, with the help of the Sacred Scriptures and the example and writings of Thomas More consider the role of prayer in the life of a follower of Christ, especially one called to serve in public office.

In his first book, Thomas More spoke not about the law but about the spiritual life. In it, he gives the following instruction on how to pray, *“I care not how long or how short your prayer is, and how effectual, how ardent, how interrupted and broken with sighs...if you desire to be secure from the snares of the devil, from the storms of this world, from the hands of your enemies; if you long to be acceptable to God; if you covet everlasting happiness—then let no day pass without at least once presenting yourself to God in prayer, falling down before Him flat on the ground with a humble affection and a devout mind; not merely with your lips, but from the innermost recesses of your heart, crying out these words of the prophet: ‘The sins of my youth and my frailties remember not, but in your mercy remember me because of your goodness [Ps 25:7].’”*

More’s ultimate stand in favour of his conscience over the importuning of his wife, children, associates and friends reflected the kind of division Jesus speaks about in today’s gospel, for his gospel way of life brings the followers of Jesus not a facile peace but rather division, possibly within his family household and even within one’s own interior being, one’s person.

Cette prise de position par More, donnant la primauté à sa conscience, tout en étant importuné par sa femme, ses enfants et ses associés, reflète le genre de division dont parle l’Évangile d’aujourd’hui. En effet, de suivre Jésus apporte aux disciples une paix qui est loin d’être facile et qui peut créer la division non seulement au sein d’une même famille, mais à l’intérieur de la personne, au plus profond d’elle-même.

So study of his life, thought and writings shows that Thomas More’s final decision to follow his conscience even unto death had been set long before his imprisonment in the Tower of London.

Ainsi, l'étude de la vie, de la pensée et des écrits de Thomas More démontre que sa décision irrévocable de suivre sa conscience jusqu'à la mort, avait été prise bien avant son emprisonnement dans la Tour de Londres.

More's decision was the fruit of years of searching out God's will and striving to develop such interior discipline as to be able, come hell or high water, to be guided by truth and love. His adherence to conscience was founded on a lifelong habit of daily prayer and sacrifice.

La décision, prise par More, était l'aboutissement de nombreuses années passées à chercher la volonté de Dieu, d'efforts à développer une discipline intérieure qui lui permettrait, contre vents et marées, de se laisser guider par la vérité et par l'amour. Son assentiment à suivre sa conscience est fondé sur des habitudes de vie, de prière quotidienne et de sacrifice.

In his biography of Thomas More, Professor Gerard B. Wegemer describes More's first four years after leaving home to begin his law studies (p. 15), "*During these years, More worked at developing his prayer life and achieving self-mastery...As a result, he began the spiritual practices he would maintain for the rest of his life. Until the time of his imprisonment, he started each day with private prayer, study and Mass...He also limited the number of hours he slept, fasted regularly, and strove to teach his quick tongue to seek charity rather than victory.*"

The prayer of Paul in the first reading today tells of the depth of a relationship with God that allows a follower of Christ to be intimately united with God in Christ, to know the depth of the relationship that can be ours and that can help us overcome the inner weaknesses that might cause us to betray conscience and its echo of the divine purpose.

Out of the depth of such prayer—and it takes discipline for any of us (whether a bishop, lawyer, judge or belonging to any other state in life) to find time for such prayer—out of prayer comes the awareness shared by St. Paul, that "the power at work in us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine."

As we continue our prayer and reflection today, let us ask for the insight that Thomas More obtained, from his early twenties, and the conviction that the greatest threat to freedom of conscience does not come from outside a man but from within his own heart. The freedom to be true to conscience has to be won anew, day after day, through the discipline of self-sacrifice, ongoing conversion and prayer. Freedom of conscience requires freedom from self-deception, freedom from fear, and freedom from pride.

Alors que nous poursuivons notre eucharistie, demandons à Thomas More la lucidité d'esprit qu'il a obtenue, dès le début de la vingtaine, ainsi que sa conviction profonde que la plus grande menace à la liberté de conscience ne vient pas de l'extérieur, mais bien de l'intérieur de l'homme, dans son propre cœur. La fidélité à

sa propre conscience, vécue en toute liberté, se choisit et se vit quotidiennement, au jour le jour, grâce à la discipline que présupposent le sacrifice de soi, la conversion constante et la prière. La liberté de conscience exige la liberté c'est-à-dire: être libre de tout aveuglement, de toute peur et de tout orgueil.

May God graciously grant such freedom to all of us today and in the days to come as, one and all, we strive to serve the common good.

Amen.

Que le Seigneur dans sa bienveillance, nous accorde à tous et toutes une telle liberté aujourd'hui et demain, dans nos efforts de servir le bien commun.

Amen.