

Red Mass Homily
April 5, 2017
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Diocesan Administrator of Pensacola-Tallahassee

Your Excellencies, Archbishop Wenski and the Bishops of the Province of Miami, Governor Scott, distinguished members of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches of government in the State of Florida, my brother priests, deacons and consecrated religious, brothers and sisters all: I am honored to have the privilege of offering some reflections on this 42nd annual Red Mass. We gather as a community of faith seeking the abundance of God's blessings upon the men and women who serve our state at various levels of government. It is a moment for us to pause and ask God to shower upon us the gifts that Isaiah spoke about in our first reading: wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge and fear of the Lord. We are confident that God will give us these gifts because Jesus had promised us the Advocate, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father.

In our country today, we need to see our leaders, people of integrity, lead in the best of times and the worst of times. Leaders must maintain a climate of mutual trust so that we can all work together to build a more just society that is concerned with the common good. If we seek the common good and are willing to be committed to it, we will need wisdom, prudence and generosity. We share this calling to work for the common good whether we are Christians or Jews, Republicans or Democrats, white or black.

The common good does not require that we agree on everything but rather that we continue to grow in a greater respect for each other recognizing the basic and inalienable rights of each person. In order to do this we must be visionaries. Our Founding Fathers were visionaries who sought liberty, prosperity and freedom. This generation of leaders must also be visionaries who are guided in forming their vision by the Advocate, the Spirit of truth proclaimed in our Gospel.

And visionary leaders must influence others to be visionaries helping those they serve to realize their dignity and move them to be responsible for their brothers and sisters in the human family. Visionary leaders bring out the best in their followers. Jesus challenged his disciples to testify to what they had heard from the beginning and what they had seen and heard would change them and mold them into leaders.

The visionary leader is an effective leader who does not simply react to the circumstances around them but is willing to introduce change which allows people to move to greatness which makes all things possible.

This is a critical time in our national dialogue. Many are uncomfortable, fearful, unconvinced and concerned. In times like these we need leaders who will humbly lead with passion, boldness and a spirit of improvisation. You, the honorable members of our executive, legislative and judicial branches of our government, are the people we expect to articulate a

vision for us. Vision implies seeing what others do not see; appreciating the beauty, hope and challenge of new ideas; and giving us an insight into the wisdom to see where we are going and where we need to go even when we are confronted by ambiguity, conflict and change. When you articulate for us a vision, we are able to see the big picture, all sides of an issue and let go of our vested interests and biases in order to embrace the common good. Pope Francis said that “the common good Is much more than the sum of individual interests. It moves from ‘what is best for me’ to ‘what is best for everyone.’ It embraces everything which brings a people together: common purpose, shared values, ideas which help us look beyond our limited individual horizons.”

Those of us who are leaders in the Church as well as those who serve as leaders in government must continually articulate our vision. Vision is not what we see but how we look at things. It's not what we think but how we think. It is not that we see the future but how we respond to the future. It is not that we appreciate community but how we see ourselves and others interacting in community. Vision must energize and give meaning so that we can embrace a standard of excellence.

St. Paul tells us tonight that we are to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received. Today the church gathers to pray for and with those who have embraced the noble profession of government and law. We ask that the Spirit of God fill your hearts, give you unity and always fill you with the bond of his peace. The most noblest of politicians in our nation's history was President George Washington. His farewell address, originally written four years before he retired, stresses the need to preserve unity and the importance of religious principles on public morality. It is interesting to note, that he delayed his retirement because he felt growing disputes would rip apart the country. His advice to his fellow citizens, published in September 1796 might be well for us to hear again. Visionary leaders must preserve unity and allow religious principles to influence public morality if they are to foster the common good.

Governor Scott and my friends in the Florida government: we have elected you, we may disagree with you, we may challenge you. But we will always pray for you. We gather here in this Co-Cathedral tonight because we hunger and thirst for justice, we hunger and thirst for a word from the Lord, we hunger and thirst to be people of integrity. As we leave this time of prayer and worship, we have confidence that God will fill us with his Spirit, his wisdom and his guidance so that we can do what the Prophet Micah called the Israelite people to do and still calls us to do: to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.