

**Judge Michael W. Fitzgerald**  
**Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Los Angeles**  
**October 15, 2019**

May it please Your Excellency, Father O'Brien, Reverend Clergy, Honorable Judges, Members of the Bar, Distinguished Guests:

It's an honor to extend the thanks of the Bench and Bar to the Archdiocese and the St. Thomas More Society for organizing this annual event. I was honored – if surprised – to receive the invitation from the St. Thomas More Society to do so. But when I learned that the preacher would be a nationally known Jesuit scholar who is also a lawyer, I assumed the thought was that only a federal judge would be arrogant and foolhardy enough to speak second.

As a federal judge, I must note the absence of Judge Manuel Real, the legendary Chief Judge of my court who served for over 50 years and recently passed away at the age of 95. Manny was forceful and independent on the bench, but off the bench he was a model of Christian humility combined with a shrewd sense of humor. Manny regularly attended this service from its beginning in the Archdiocese and was a great supporter of the St. Thomas More Society. He will be missed.

Although I haven't attended since the beginning as Manny did, I have often attended over the last 30 years, since I was a new Assistant United States Attorney and the service was held at Immaculate Conception Church across the street from Loyola Law School. Therefore, I've had a long time to think about this question: Why are we all here? For many, this will be an unfamiliar service, and even devout Catholics might find themselves wondering why they are in church on a Tuesday evening that isn't a Holy Day of Obligation.

## *CLOSING REMARKS – 37TH ANNUAL RED MASS*

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So I ask again, why are we all here?

I believe there are three reasons:

The first reason is that this service is such a venerable tradition. By participating tonight, we make manifest our aspiration that the legal community *be* a community, committed to the impartial rule of law, with lawyers and judges linked together in Los Angeles, across our nation, across the decades, and, indeed, across the centuries.

The second reason is that the St. Thomas More Society extends a broad invitation. In the letter inviting me to speak, the Society described the Red Mass in Los Angeles as “an ecumenical event wherein we invite members of all faiths and traditions not only to attend, but to participate in the Mass as well. The St. Thomas More Society of Los Angeles values diversity not only by race, ethnicity, gender and orientation but by beliefs as well.”

My own family illustrates how broad the invitation is. I’ve often attended with my parents who’ve been parishioners at St. Cyprian’s near Lakewood for 65 years; today is my father’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Tonight I attend with my husband Arturo Vargas, the CEO of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials.

In other words, this invitation to participate is given not only to those in the legal community of all faiths, but also to those who are suspicious of the Church as an earthly institution and to those who respectfully disagree with some of the Church’s teachings, while recognizing her Constitutional right to teach and proclaim what she believes to be the truth.

This Cathedral is symbolic of both tradition and that broad invitation. Yes, this grand edifice holds the Chair of the Roman

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Catholic Archbishop and Metropolitan of Los Angeles. But it is also part of the fabric of the civic center at the heart of our great city. We're reminded of that when it hosts the funerals of police officers fallen in the line of duty. This Cathedral was built to be a "House of Prayer for All Peoples," the words of the Prophet Isaiah that are carved on its cornerstone. In the courtyard there's a fountain of Jerusalem limestone inscribed in Hebrew, a gift of the Los Angeles Jewish community. I remember when this service first moved here; the presiding judge of the Superior Court, standing where I stand now, began his remarks by saying, "All this Presbyterian boy can say is 'Wow'".

But even a broad and sincere invitation will not necessarily be accepted, especially more than once. The third reason that we've come here tonight is the most important. The reason we are lawyers is to serve justice and thereby make the world a better place. Our community exists to serve. That is the lesson of the readings and Father O'Brien's homily. That's why we applied to law school in the first place. That's true of Father O'Brien and it's true of each of us.

But it's difficult to reflect on service day-to-day. Only a fool would go to law school solely to make money, or seek a judicial appointment solely for prestige and a pension, and I don't think it's greed or pride that gets in the way of such a daily reflection.

Rather, it is simply the daily grind. We have hard jobs. Those of us in private practice are looking for clients or billing too many hours or trying to get paid for those hours or dealing with irascible judges. Those of us working for government agencies or corporations must reconcile professional ethics with the demands of a single client while being constantly told to do more with less. Those of us who are judges must deal with ever-rising caseloads.

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Therefore, it is a gift each year to the legal community that we have the chance to step back briefly from the daily grind. Tonight reminds us that each of us has the opportunity to serve justice and thereby make Los Angeles a better place. For this annual gift, the Archdiocese and the St. Thomas More Society deserve the thanks of the Bench and Bar. And should it be that, through our collective service, we do make Los Angeles a better place, then truly may we say “Thanks be to God.”