



**Remarks, Los Angeles Red Mass, Oct. 21, 2015**  
**Associate Justice Carol Corrigan, California Supreme Court**

Thank you, Joe, for that very kind introduction.

The Red Mass is a wonderful tradition that, as you know, has been celebrated for over 700 years. It gives us a chance to come together as judges & lawyers & people of faith, who are members of a big, welcoming family.

Whether you were born & raised Catholic, or came to the faith later, or whether you come to this evening gracing it with your own rich spiritual tradition, tonight, we are all united in our belief that the spiritual dimension is important in our lives, and in our work as members of this profession which we share.

We draw inspiration from our mentor and patron:  
Sir – and – saint, Thomas More.

Sir & Saint. That's an interesting combination in itself. Down through history, it has never been easy to wield secular power and aspire to sainthood. Those who tried to do both sometimes found themselves on the scaffold, or at the stake.

As More said of his friendship with the king: "If my head were to win his grace a castle in France, it should not fail to fall." Prophetic, indeed. Henry never got that French castle, but he did get the girl; at least for the moment.

Thomas More was a complex man of intellect, commitment, courage & faith. Samuel Johnson described him as the "person of the greatest virtue these islands ever produced." Robert Bolt, in his preface to "A Man for All Seasons" invites us to see More, the man, which is most appropriate.

If we believe with the Greeks that the unexamined life is not worth living, we might also consider its corollary: That the unexamined life is little worth remembering or emulating.

Plaster saints seldom inspire for long.

So, when we examine More, the man, we find an accomplished scholar of the law, and lord chancellor of England, who bore his authority with humor and humanity.

He was not an eager martyr, touting his rectitude over others. Instead he was a man who made a demanding choice, in the quiet of his own conscience.

Bolt points out that if the term “society” is the construct we use to describe patterned & orderly human existence, then the law is “the very pattern of society.”

It may rightly be said that civilization is the legacy of the law, and that those who care for the law tend to the very soul of a people.

There is a wonderful scene in “A Man for All Seasons,” where More is in prison, having steadfastly refused to take an oath and say that he believes Henry’s marriage to Anne Boleyn is legitimate.

He has lost his chancellorship and his property, his family faces penury, and he faces the gallows. So his wife, and daughter, and son-in-law come to visit him in the tower of London, to make one final plea that he change his mind.

In real life, More had a bright and clever daughter, Meg, whom he took great care to educate, at a time when the education of women was an exquisite rarity – something else to praise the man for.

In the play, Meg makes sound philosophical arguments to sway More. But, in the end More says to her: “When a man takes an oath, he holds his very self in his hands, like water, and if he opens his fingers then, he needn’t hope to find himself again, some men aren’t capable of this, but I am loath to think your father one of them.”

So, we consider how More got to the tower, and why he *chose* to stay there. After all, he held the keys to his freedom in his own hands. So, his choice is a remarkable act of self-possession: he knows that if he stays the king will cut his head off.

In that consideration More emerges as a man for whom *ideas mattered*. His life and death teach lessons of integrity and faith and responsibility.

More was a man to whom much of intellectual Europe looked for leadership. His opinion gave legitimacy. That's why winning his approval was so important to Henry VIII. Important to the point of the executioner's block. Now, happily, few of us will ever be tested as Thomas More was tested.

But how does an examination of More's life & example, inform our own, all these centuries on?

We share with More his devotion to the law & its scholarship, its stabilizing role in making *human* justice possible. If our faith is a covenant with god, the law is a covenant among us as Californians, as Americans, as people who enact, and depend upon the law.

As people of faith, we bring a particular insight into what a solemn covenant means. How it plays out in the push and pull, in the competition & chaos of daily life.

And, like More, we are sometimes challenged to be a source of constancy: to be people whose ideas matter - *Not* because we are more virtuous, but because we recognize the need to *aspire* toward virtue.

Sometimes that aspiration can carry with it discomfort, even risk. Sometimes it takes what Chief Justice John Roberts has called lonely courage: to risk running against the popular thought of the moment. To take a step toward righting a wrong, or preventing one.

The law, and our faith, as each of us discerns that faith for ourselves, in the quiet of our own conscience. Those are the threads we weave together on evenings like this one, when we reflect, in this community, on the gifts we have been given, and the obligations that come with them.

Everyone in this grand cathedral has been astonishingly blessed: with intellectual ability, that, most days, works pretty well; with education; opportunity, accomplishment, & comfort.

We have responsible roles in a society that embraces the rule of law, and recognizes the law as the *glue* that holds our rich, rollicking, challenging, diverse society together.

And our faith reminds us, that all those blessings bring, too, the blessing of obligation.

To follow Pope Francis's call for inclusion, and service. To embrace those with whom we agree, and, as importantly, to reach out to those who see the world differently.

To give voice to the most essential of our values and to make sure that *everyone's* voice is heard. To act, as the Pope encouraged that young woman to sing for him – “to be courageous.”

We take great pride in saying that, in our free society, the law *belongs* to everyone. But it falls to us to ensure that it also *works* for everyone.

Because of all we have been given, we have the chance to use our talents, our education, our accomplishments, to do a great many things: reduce conflict and uncertainty, protect our communities & keep them safe, to nurture a non-profit, to help a lonely child find a family, and, oh yes, to do a little justice.

We can save a school, save the planet, save a life.

That's pretty heady stuff. The ability to do those things is not given to many, but it's given to us, each in our own way.

Our faith informs us that is a challenge we cannot shirk. And nights like tonight challenge us not to forget it.

May the Holy Spirit continue to keep the memory of that challenge alive in all of us. And, as the Irish say, may the good Lord continue to hold us all in the hollow of his hand.