

Closing Remarks:

Honorable André Birotte Jr.

St. Thomas More Society's 36th Annual Red Mass Tuesday, October 16, 2018

Thank you for the kind introduction.

It is with great honor that I join you today for the St. Thomas More Society's 36th Annual Red Mass. The history of the Red Mass is storied and, to some extent, incredible to fathom. The first documented Red Mass was celebrated in the Cathedral of Paris in 1245—well before the Eiffel Tower illuminated the night's sky.

The world has changed in ways that would have been practically incomprehensible to those early attendees but the message of the Red Mass is just as important as it was nearly eight centuries ago.

Whether born and raised in the Catholic faith as I was, making a connection with Catholicism later in life, or attending here tonight with your own deep spiritual tradition, we all can appreciate this revered ceremony which reminds us that, at its core, the practice of law is the practice of public service.

It is then unsurprising that Sir Thomas More became the venerated Saint Thomas More only after settling into history as an academic, statesman, lawyer, and above all else an advocate for the public good. Amongst the turmoil of the world around him, Sir Thomas More grounded himself on keen religious sentiment which helped him as he served King and country.

This underachiever: From Oxford-trained lawyer—enthralled by culture, theology, and literature, to Parliament and Lord Chancellor. My goodness what a life and he made it look easy!

He was both a family man and a man whom firmly believed that there was space for his faith in public service. And even in the face of a ruler with a volatile temperament and a penchant for overreaction, he held firmly to those convictions.

In his judgment, he relied on the rule of law and believed in a duty to the public good above all. That included his personal welfare, and Sir Thomas More had the conviction to object when he dissented. Despite the world changing ever

too slowly to keep up with him, Sir Thomas More remained steadfast in convictions that were famously unpopular.

The parallels to being a member of the legal profession today and at the time of Saint Thomas More are strikingly apparent.

We are faced with challenges and changes in this world that raise questions internally about the role of the lawyer and public servant. Amongst the tumult—the political rancor, an influx in poverty and homelessness, and the spread of confusing and conflicting information—lawyers are uniquely responsible for bringing our knowledge and wisdom to those in need.

Oftentimes, this wisdom will determine outcomes that reverberate well beyond our own circles.

Despite what may occasionally feel like a stressful profession and an inconvenient time to carry the burdens associated with it, we must remind ourselves of the exceptional privileges and duties we have as lawyers. Like Saint Thomas More before us, we must grapple with questions that will challenge our faith; we must continue to look inside ourselves and strike a balance between our duty to the public and our duty to ourselves. We must allow our moral and ethical convictions to guide us so we can continue to navigate this rapidly changing world with a fervor reminiscent of Saint Thomas More himself.

If that sounds like a lot of work—it's because it is. But it has been famously said “Public Service is the rent for our space on this Great Earth” and I believe it's our obligation as lawyers to continue to pay that rent and help others.

It is fitting then that the Red Mass occurs just a few weeks after the opening of the Supreme Court term where Justice hear and decide cases that impact our nation.

As one of the many Supreme Court justices to have been a public servant in her former life, Justice O'Connor said “We don't accomplish anything in this world alone... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads form one to another that creates something.”

I hope this sentiment reminds us that our work will not be done alone; each of us has come to the Red Mass tonight with some understanding of our role and responsibilities in the profession. I hope that we can all leave with a renewed

sense of self and a heightened motivation and that we remember that through our faith and commitment to public service, we can have an overwhelming impact on weaving together the threads of justice.