

Red Mass homilist calls mercy, fraternity vital in administering justice

WASHINGTON (CNS) – Those involved in the “sacred responsibilities of justice, public service and diplomatic work” must administer justice in a spirit of mercy and fraternity, the Vatican’s permanent observer to the United Nations said on Oct. 3 during the 69th annual Red Mass in Washington.

“Justice without fraternity is cold, blind and minimalistic. Justice infused by fraternity, on the other hand, never remains an abstract application of norms to situations; rather it is transformed into an attentive application of laws to persons we care about,” said Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, homilist for the Mass at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle.

“Fraternity is what makes it possible for justice to be perfected by mercy for all involved, since the restoration of justice is always ultimately the resolution of a ‘family dispute,’ considering we are all members of the same human family,” said the archbishop, the Vatican’s permanent observer to the United Nations.

The Red Mass is sponsored by the John Carroll Society, a group of lay men and women in the Archdiocese of Washington from a variety of professions who participate in religious, intellectual, charitable and social activities.

It is traditionally celebrated on the Sunday before the first Monday in October, the day when the U.S. Supreme Court starts its new term after a summer recess.

The Mass is offered to invoke God’s blessings on those

responsible for the administration of justice as well as on all public officials.

The name comes from the color of the liturgical vestments worn by the celebrants and the color of fire, a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory of Washington was the principal celebrant of the Mass. Concelebrants included Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States; Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia; retired Bishop Paul S. Loverde of Arlington; Auxiliary Bishop Joseph L. Coffey of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services; and Washington Auxiliary Bishops Roy E. Campbell Jr. and Mario E. Dorsonville.

Msgr. W. Ronald Jameson, rector of St. Matthew's Cathedral, Msgr. Peter Vaghi, chaplain to the John Carroll Society, and several other priests also concelebrated the liturgy.

Traditionally the Mass is attended by Supreme Court justices, members of the president's Cabinet, members of Congress, members of the diplomatic corps, government officials and lawmakers, judges and lawyers and others involved in the administration of justice.

In opening remarks, Msgr. Vaghi noted that among those present were Chief Justice of the United States John G. Roberts; U.S. Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough; John DeGioia, president of Georgetown University; John Garvey, president of The Catholic University of America; and deans and students from area law schools.

As per the District of Columbia's COVID-19 safety regulations, Massgoers wore masks. They also were seated socially distanced throughout the cathedral. In addition, the liturgy was livestreamed via the Internet.

Referring to the Mass's Gospel reading from St. Mark in which

the Pharisees challenged Jesus with questions about the law of Moses, Archbishop Caccia said in his homily, "Justice was being used as a pretext to challenge and condemn – or, we could say, to do injustice."

"Today, like at the time of Jesus, there is the risk to exploit justice instead of delivering it," he said.

"There is a logos, a reason, a logic built into us and into all of reality that is at the basis of justice," he noted and warned that "if we do not place ourselves before God ... there is the risk to 'use' even God for our own ends instead of serving him."

Archbishop Caccia said that Jesus sought to lead the Pharisees from "the hardness of their hearts" and instead "place themselves in the presence of God with an openness to understand what is God's plan."

"Those who receive God and draw near to him, draw near to his justice," the archbishop said. "Without this humble attitude, we risk repeating what the ancient Romans expressed. ... Even just laws, they asserted, can result in injustice when unaccompanied by a just heart."

Noting that the annual Mass was being offered just one day before the first anniversary of the publication of Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Archbishop Caccia encouraged lawmakers to "not only draw near as neighbor to those in need, but take responsibility for them as a brother or sister."

In quoting the encyclical – in which the pope wrote, "Each day we have to decide whether to be good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders" – Archbishop Caccia told those in the legal profession that "each day we determine whether or not we're ashamed to treat others as brothers and sisters."

Noting that everyone is on a "journey of truth and continual

conversion,” Archbishop Caccia urged the congregation to remember that “every time we treat others as objects that we can ‘grasp’ and use for our own purposes, we lose them. If we, however, receive them as a gift, we can start a relationship that may last a lifetime.”

“This is the relationship that God envisages for us,” he said, “and we are called to embrace this revelation with gratitude and let it inform our whole life.”

Archbishop Caccia prayed the Holy Spirit “will come down upon each of us and all those involved in carrying out the sacred responsibilities of justice, public service and diplomatic work,” and asked God “for the grace to grow in justice as his beloved sons and daughters.”

He said the Red Mass “is a powerful reminder that justice has to do with something sacred and that those who practice its administration are at the service of something larger and greater than themselves.”

At the beginning of the Mass, a Knights of Columbus color guard marched down the aisle carrying the U.S. and Vatican flags. After the presentation of the colors, the congregation sang the national anthem.

During the Mass, prayers were offered for those who serve the public in federal, state and local offices; for those suffering from COVID-19 and other health challenges; and for peace in the world.

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