

Homily — Red Mass:

*Most Reverend José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles*

*Christ Cathedral
Orange, California
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I want to thank Bishop Vann and Bishop Freyer for their invitation today and I want to say that it is an honor for me to be at this Red Mass.

America is a nation of laws, and preserving and protecting the rule of law is a noble vocation and a solemn duty that you share as judges and lawyers and members of the legal profession.

We pray tonight to strengthen you in your vocation, that you continue to see your professional work in light of your faith, as true followers of Jesus Christ.

And as we gather tonight, we also want to pray for our country and pray for those entrusted to lead our country. We pray for them to carry out their duties with integrity and true dedication to the common good.

As we pray, the readings selected for tonight's liturgy invite us to reflect on the foundations and fundamentals of law.

Our first reading tonight was from the law of Moses; in fact, the name of the book we heard from, Deuteronomy, means "the second law."

As you may know, this law, the *Torah*, orders the Israelites' relationship with God, their life together in community, and their relations with the nations around them. It is an important source for our legal tradition in the West.

And, as we heard today in this reading, the law of Moses includes a powerful command for the protection of immigrants and refugees, orphans and widows.

Moses tells us that any just society should also have a kind of "preferential option" for the poor, the weak and the vulnerable.

And as we heard tonight, this is a direct command from God, who hears the cry of the poor. As we heard:

*For remember you were once slaves in Egypt
and the Lord, your God ransomed you from there;
that is why I command you to observe this rule.*

Here we see that the human laws we make must always be grounded in the divine law, the law of God — in the truth that we have a Creator and that every person is created in his image, created for his purposes, born of his love.

America's founders knew this. The American system of government depends on this belief.

The founders understood that the only reason for law and government is to serve the human person. And they understood that the human person is endowed with God-given dignity, rights and responsibilities, and who is called to a destiny that lies beyond politics and economics.

And yet, my dear brothers and sisters, today we know that this foundation, this connection of human law with the divine law, is eroding. We know that our civil law today is becoming detached from objective moral truth.

This is dangerous for our democracy. Our founders knew that our human rights and duties come from God. Not from government, not from a courts or a legislature. From God.

And law without God leads to the denial of the human person.

Politics and law are meant to be aimed at human flourishing and the common good. But if we do not know the true nature and the true reason of the human person, then our politics and law just become confusion.

So we need to work hard to protect religious freedom and the rights of individuals to follow their conscience. Religious freedom becomes more and more urgent as our society becomes more aggressively secular and hostile to faith, particularly Christianity.

More than that, we need to restore the founders' awareness that our natural rights are a gift from the Creator and that our human laws must reflect and conform to a higher law — what they called “the laws of nature and of nature's God.”

This is a task for all of us, but especially for you in your professions, my brothers and sisters.

And then, our Gospel today invites us also to reflect on the need to restore a sense of mercy and even love in our society.

Our God creates us out of love and he redeems us out of mercy, and he calls us to love one another as he has loved us and to be merciful as he is merciful.

This is the lesson of that beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan that we heard this evening in our Gospel.

And I think that question, that the scholar of law asks to Jesus, is the question of our times: “*And who is my neighbor?*”

This lawyer wants to know what are the limits — who does he have to pay attention to, who is he free to ignore? He wants to know the minimum requirements of his responsibility for others.

I think that sometimes, we see that kind of thinking today in our debates over migrants and refugees, and also in our dialogues about the crisis of homelessness.

As a nation, I worry that we seem to be growing tired of being generous. There is a certain indifference, a kind of “compassion fatigue” that creeps in.

But Jesus today is calling each of us to make ourselves a neighbor to everyone in need. We heard this in the final dialogue with the lawyer at the end of the Gospel:

“Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?”

The man answers, *“The one who treated him with mercy.”*
And then Jesus tells him, *“Go and do likewise.”*

These words are meant for all of us, my brothers and sisters. Christian love is love with no limits.

Our neighbor is anyone and everyone — no matter the color of their skin or their country of origin or their legal status. No matter whether helping them is convenient to us or not.

And the love we are called to, is more than a feeling. Love must be expressed in works of mercy. And I think this quality of mercy is missing a lot in our society nowadays.

Like that Good Samaritan, we need to see others in their neediness, in their pain. And we are called to show compassion, because in the “other” we always meet a brother or a sister made in the image of God.

Today, as we know, is also the Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary.

So, let us entrust ourselves, then, to Mary.

And let us meditate with her upon the mysteries of the life of Jesus — so that we might love him more and that we make our faith the light that shapes all our commitments.

St. Thomas More, pray for us!