

Cardinal Sean's homily from the Red Mass 2016.

It's a joy to be able to celebrate this Red Mass with you today.

In my family, there are about a dozen lawyers and I only escaped that same fate by running off to the seminary. But still, I have a great reverence for your noble legal profession. In fact, in two of my four dioceses it was my joy to be able to initiate the Red Mass. Thirty years ago, as Bishop in the West Indies, I celebrated the first Red Mass there — it was memorable. Because I had announced it was going to be the Red Mass, everyone showed up at the cathedral dressed in red.

We were televising the Mass on the local Catholic television station, as well as simulcasting on the local radio station, and the chief of the radio station insisted on being the announcer for the Mass, even though he was not antequely accustomed to the Catholic nomenclature. And so when he described the procession into the cathedral, he talked about the presence of the governor, the judges, the legislators, the diplomatic corps, the lawyers and court officials. And then he described the fourth degree Knights of Columbus, with their plumed hats, capes and swords. And he said, describing the Catholic Daughters who were walking behind the Knights of Columbus, that the Knights are being followed by the Ladies of the Knights. Needless to say that the Catholic Daughters, when they found out, were not amused.



Having successfully launched the Red Mass in the Islands, it was also my privilege to start the Red Mass in Fall River and last month I was invited for the 20th anniversary, and so it's a real joy to be able to celebrate it here in my own Cathedral of the Holy Cross.

I am so grateful to the Catholic Lawyers' Guild of the Archdiocese for organizing this Mass each year. I wish to recognize the presence of our President, Michael Gillis and the Hon. Maura Doyle, the Vice President of the Catholic Lawyers' Guild. We're also blessed to have our new chaplain here, Father Chris Palladino, who is stepping into the shoes left by Bishop Mark O'Connell, who has joined us

today. I'm so happy to have you here. I'm grateful, too, for the presence of this year's luncheon speaker, Ambassador Ray Flynn, and the presence of Ambassador Mary Ann Glendon. I wish to welcome all the judges, attorneys and all of those involved in our justice system who come to celebrate this Red Mass with us, as we invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our quest to build a more just society that truly



reflects our deepest convictions concerning the dignity of each and every human being made in the image and likeness of God and placed on this earth by the providential design of our loving Creator.

Yours is not a job, a career, or profession; it is, as St. Paul says in the second reading, a calling, a vocation to promote justice and work for the common good.

All of us are concerned about the polarization and deep divisions that have been manifest in the recent campaign. They indicated a deep sense of alienation in our country. Pope Francis addressed these feelings when he spoke to the joint session of Congress during his visit to the United States. He urged our leaders to work to overcome every form of polarization. He says: "Our response must instead be one of hope and healing, of peace and justice; we are asked to summon the courage and intelligence to resolve today's many geopolitical and economic crises.... Our efforts must aim at restoring hope, righting wrongs, maintaining commitments, and thus promoting the well-being of individuals and peoples. We must move forward together, as one, in a renewed spirit of fraternity and solidarity, cooperating generously for the common good."

The Holy Father also noted that: "In this land, the various religious denominations have greatly contributed to building and strengthening society. (We've only to think of the civil rights movement.) It is important that today, as in the past, the voice of faith continue to be heard, for it is a voice of fraternity and love, which tries to bring out the best in each person and in each society. Such cooperation is a powerful resource in the battle to eliminate new global forms of slavery, born of grave injustices which can be overcome only through new policies and new forms of social consensus."

As an aside, I want to say how gratified I am that so many of our brothers and sisters from the interfaith and ecumenical community, beginning with the Black Ministerial Association of Boston, stand with the archdiocese in opposing the commercialization of marijuana, that would make billions of dollars for the marijuana industry, but clearly at the cost of untold human suffering. It cannot be the Commonwealth's



response to the opioid crisis. Colorado, where I have a brother and several nephews, now has more marijuana shops than McDonalds and Starbucks together. The shops sell a new form of highly potent marijuana in the form of smokes, drinks and edibles. Having been a prison chaplain for two years, and having worked in an inner-city parish in Washington, D.C. for 20 years, and then being bishop in the West Indies for 10 years, I've seen up close what the so-called harmless drug, call it marijuana or ganja, has wreaked on the lives of so many families. We're not talking about decriminalization, that has already happened in Massachusetts, we're talking about commercialization, about greed trumping common sense. I am pleased that law enforcement, our governor, mayor and the medical community have also come out very strongly against this initiative. I hope that all of you will work hard to defeat this law which has been written and is being promoted by an industry that is blinded by its desire for profits. People are more important than money.

Pope Francis has given us this wonderful Jubilee of Mercy to reflect on the core gospel message. He says the face of God is mercy. In the beautiful Scripture passage we've heard this morning, it reminds us that God's most important attribute is mercy. In the first lesson from the Book of Wisdom, we heard the words: "Lord, you have mercy on all, you overlook people's sins so that they might repent. You love all you have made. You rebuke offenders little by little, warn them, and remind them of the sins they are committing, so that they might abandon their wickedness and believe in you."

As is our custom in the liturgy, the first reading at a Sunday Mass contains the same theme as the gospel reading. And today's Gospel from Luke presents the same theme of God's astonishing mercy in the beautiful story of Zacchaeus. This is not a parable, but rather the account of the historical encounter between Jesus

and the high official of the Internal Revenue Services. In our own country, people for the IRS are not beloved. I often remember the story of a pastor who received a telephone call from an IRS agent saying “Father Murphy, I’m auditing Richard Smith, one of your parishioners. Did he make a \$10,000 donation to the parish?” The pastor answered, “He will.”

If working for the Internal Revenue Service in our country does not enhance one’s popularity, we can only imagine how the Jewish people felt about the tax collectors, the so-called publicans, of those times. These men were authorized by their Roman overlords to extract as much money as they could from the conquered people of Israel. The tax collectors were allowed to keep a percentage of everything that they collected. They were experts at exploiting the poor. They were despised because they were working for the enemies of their own people.

Zacchaeus was not only one of these despicable tax collectors, in fact, he was the chief tax collector. Saint Luke gives us a rather fulsome description of this character. First of all, we are told his name, which doesn’t often happen in the Gospel. We’re given his profession as a tax collector, and we have his physical description; he was vertically challenged. And lastly, Luke reports on his bizarre behavior, he climbed a tree.



Zacchaeus, from an economic point of view, was a great success. He had lots of money. But that money did not bring him friends, inner peace or happiness. His life must have been very empty. His neighbors might have feared him, but they did not respect him and they were quick to judge and condemn him. One day Zacchaeus learned that Jesus of Nazareth was going to pass through his city of Jericho. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, but when he went to seek out the Lord, the crowd was so great and he was so small, it was impossible. It’s curious to note that in the Gospels, there’s a constant contrast between the crowd and the



community. The crowd is that collection of individuals, often in competition with each other, who end up pushing people away from the Lord and setting up barriers. On the other hand, the community of Jesus' disciples who share in his mission, are always helping to draw people closer to the Lord, to make them feel welcomed, forgiven and loved.

Undaunted by the crowd, Zacchaeus cast aside all human respect and personal dignity and in his Brooks Brothers suit and pudgy frame, he climbs a sycamore tree. I'm sure that his neighbors were quick to ridicule the spectacle. But it reminds me of what Jesus says: "Unless you become like a little child, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Zacchaeus scrambled up that tree like a kid because he wanted to see Jesus and he didn't care what people thought of him.

Finally, the Lord surrounded by the throngs of people passed under the tree, and Zacchaeus almost fell out of the tree when Jesus looked up at him and called him by his name, and said, "Zacchaeus, come down, I'm going to stay in your house." All of the respectable people were shocked, but Zacchaeus scurried down and took Jesus into his home. The Gospel says Zacchaeus was filled with joy and declared that he was going to give half of his wealth to the poor, and to all of those he had defrauded as a tax collector, he was going to make restitution fourfold. In effect, he was renouncing all of his wealth, and he did it gladly because he realized how much Jesus loved him. He knew that Jesus forgave him all of his terrible sins. He could not contain his happiness, he felt new, liberated, unburdened. His fellow countrymen looked upon him as a traitor and an outcast, but Jesus restores him as a member of God's people, saying: "This man too, is a son of Abraham."

The crowd sees him only with human eyes, all of his defects and sins, but Jesus sees what Zacchaeus can become; the new creation, a disciple, a child of God.

Luke's gospel presents us with two encounters of Jesus with rich men. The first is when Jesus meets the rich young man, who approached Jesus and said, "What do I have to do to attain eternal life?" Jesus told him to live the commandments and give his money to the poor. The Gospel tells us the rich young man went away sad.

The story of Zacchaeus is different. In the case of Zacchaeus, Jesus doesn't ask him. Jesus doesn't ask Zacchaeus to give his money to the poor, Zacchaeus does it spontaneously. He does it because he knows how much the Lord loves him. And that love makes him free and enables him to divest himself of his ill-gotten wealth, and he was filled with joy.

A true conversion to the Lord leads to meaning and purpose and joy in a person's life. And this is precisely what we see in the story of Zacchaeus. It also reminds us of God's joy over one sinner who repents. God never tires of forgiving us, never tires of loving us, never tires of giving us another chance.

Our task, as the Holy Father is pointing out in this Jubilee Year, is to show the merciful face of God to our broken world. But, we must be convinced of how much our God loves us. In discovering God's love, we discover who we are, why we're here on this earth, and what we need to do with our lives. If mercy is the face of God, it must also be the face of the Church, it must be our face.



Few professions have the kind of impact on society that your does. You are routinely involved in issues that are fraught with ethical implications, life-and-death consequences, repercussions that impact the quality of life, the questions of the sacredness of life, the defense of the vulnerable, the care for creation and the environment, economic justice for the poor and the disenfranchised, human rights, human dignity, preservation of freedom, respect for conscience, promotion of the common good. Therefore, carelessness, sloth, incompetence, indifference, corruption in your profession cause untold suffering in the general population. Hence, your personal conversion, your struggle to be holy, to embrace the ideals of the gospel will be of enormous benefit to our spiritually bankrupt society.



I urge you to pursue courageously the lofty ideals of which your profession calls you to be the guardians of our democracy. Taking that high road is often like climbing the sycamore tree. The world will laugh at you for not being politically

correct. Your stance will be dismissed as childish, and there's always the danger of falling and breaking your neck.

But the trip up that sycamore tree, as in the case of Zacchaeus, will allow you to discover what is really important and to realize that you are not alone. The Lord will call you by name and come to your house. You will experience the joy of friendship with Christ, the joy of conversion, the joy of overcoming our fears, our pride, our selfishness. Yes, the trip up the sycamore tree is always a preface to the spiritual freedom that allows us to share our riches with the poor, it affords us the light in humility to deepen our own conversion, recognizing our own sins and look for make amends to all of those we have harmed by our action or our inaction.

The red vestments of the Mass of the Holy Spirit speak to us about our need for God's guidance and enlightenment. But the red vestments also speak to us about martyrdom, about courageously witnessing to the truths that set us free.

Yes, climbing the sycamore tree is a journey of faith, a faith that elevates us and allows us to have a bird's-eye view of reality. It will help us to see the world through God's eyes. God who so loved the world that he sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who is now sending us as His Disciples to build a civilization of love where mercy and truth will meet, where justice and peace will kiss.