The tradition of the Red Mass was begun by Pope Innocent IV in 1243 for the Ecclesial Judicial Court asking the invocation of the Holy Spirit as a source of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude and strength for the coming term of the court. The color red signifies the Holy Spirit and martyrdom. St. Thomas More is the patron saint of lawyers.

Mass with Bishop Timothy L. Doherty followed by a dinner for legal professionals and a presentation by Notre Dame Law Professor Richard W. Garnett

Monday, October 5, 2020 | 5:30 PM
Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception (Lafayette)

RSVP online: www.dol-in.org/RedMass
The Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana will celebrate the fifth annual Red Mass on Monday, October 5, 2020, at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Lafayette at 5:30 pm. All government officials (federal, state, local levels, executive, legislative, judicial branches), attorneys, paralegals, law students and their spouses are cordially invited to attend. One does not have to be Catholic to join us in prayer and fellowship for the legal community.

The Red Mass is a tradition in the Catholic Church which dates back to the 13th century. The first Red Mass is believed to have been celebrated in the Cathedral of Paris in 1245, and thereafter the tradition spread throughout Europe. A Red Mass was initially celebrated to mark the beginning of the annual term of the courts but can be held at other times.

The word “red” was originally used to describe the Mass in 1310, because the justices of the English Supreme Court wore scarlet robes. Over time the “Red” Mass came to have a deeper theological meaning, with red symbolizing the “tongues of fire” that descended upon the Apostles at Pentecost bestowing the gifts of the Spirit.

In the United States the first Red Mass was celebrated in New York City on October 6, 1928, at Old St. Andrew’s Church with Cardinal Patrick Hayes. Today over 25 dioceses throughout the United States celebrate a Red Mass each year, not only with fellow Catholics in the legal community, but with persons of all faith traditions in attendance.

One of the better known Red Masses is celebrated each fall at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington, D.C., before the Supreme Court begins its new term. This Mass is attended by the Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court, members of Congress, the President’s cabinet, and other federal and local government officials. Those who attend do so as private citizens and not in an official capacity to ensure proper boundaries between Church and state.

Despite this rich history, one might still ask why celebrate a Red Mass? In a culture facing many challenges and divisions, such a gathering is needed to exhort those governing society. It has always been the teaching of the Church to respect proper governmental authority and to seek divine guidance and protection for those who represent others. Moreover, those who serve in the legal community have a pivotal role promoting unity, liberty, justice, equal protection under the law and the common good. It is incumbent, therefore, that the Church support and pray for humility, knowledge, understanding, wisdom and courage, for those who are the stewards of our common good.

About Our Speaker

Professor Richard W. Garnett teaches and writes about the freedoms of speech, association, and religion and constitutional law more generally. He is a leading authority on questions and debates regarding the role of religious believers and beliefs in politics and society. He has published widely on these matters and is the author of dozens of law-review articles and book chapters. Garnett is regularly invited to share analysis and commentary in national print and broadcast media, and he contributes to several law-related blogs, including Mirror of Justice and PrawfsBlawg.

He is the founding director of Notre Dame Law School’s Program on Church, State, and Society, an interdisciplinary project that focuses on the role of religious institutions, communities, and authorities in the social order. He served on the Notre Dame Task Force on Catholic Education, is a Fellow of the University’s Institute for Educational Initiatives, and consults regularly with the Alliance for Catholic Education.


Legal Saints

Many Catholics may be aware of St. Thomas More, who is the patron saint of lawyers and government officials. However, there are many other canonized saints on the Church’s universal calendar of feasts who were also attorneys: Ss. Ambrose, Pope Gregory the Great, John Chrysostom, Cyprian, Charles Borromeo, Alphonsus Ligouri, Francis de Sales, Thomas Becket, Raymond of Penyafort, Capistrano, Paulinus of Nola, Cajetan, Turbius of Mongrovejo, and Fidelis of Sigmaringen. The same is true for saintly government leaders: Ss. Constantine the Great, Stephen of Hungary, Wenceslaus, Henry, Louis IX of France, Hedwig, Margaret of Scotland, Bridget of Sweden, Elizabeth of Portugal, and Elizabeth of Hungary.