

Thursday 13 October 2011  
Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus  
*Atlanta, Georgia*

**Red Mass 2011**

✠Wilton D. Gregory,  
*Archbishop of Atlanta*

Honored and Distinguished Guests and Friends,

Our nation reverentially paused last month in commemoration of the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the terrorist attack of 9-11. It was a time of immense and widespread reflection and clearly born from that rumination there was a noticeable and increased appreciation for those whom we frequently now call *First Responders*. These men and women who even before 9-11 placed themselves at the disposal and at the service of their fellow citizens as fire-fighters, police officers, military personnel, emergency medical workers, and public servants whose bravery and generous dedication to duty daily make life safer for all of us.

Few occasions in our nation's history have provided such a need for these men and women of courage as did 9-11 and our memories of that tragic day necessarily must include a profound and revitalized sense of gratitude for their presence and for their dedication.

*First Responders* is however a very broad term and I would dare say it must also include those engaged in the administration of justice throughout our nation. While you and your colleagues were not called into such immediate service and in the same fashion as those who risked their lives on that noteworthy date, lawyers, judges, and court officials nonetheless continue to provide a service and duty no less important to our welfare as a nation. Like those more commonly referred to as *First Responders*, your life occupation can never be adequately equated with being simply a job – or routine occupational employment. Certainly you are professionals in the loftiest sense of that term, but you are also people whose responsibilities must always go well beyond that of earning a living – your work is much more than merely a career. It is a sacred trust given to you by the people of the community and only adequately fulfilled in living up to the noblest execution of your tasks.

Quite simply put, you are entrusted with the adjudication of the laws of our land and the handling of the works of justice. This is no simple job and the confidence that has been placed in you and your skills and competence is never adequately compensated by a check no matter how generous it might be. The people of this community of North Georgia look to

you and to all of your colleagues for expertise, compassion, and righteousness in the exercise of justice. We depend upon you no less than did those whose lives were placed in jeopardy on 9-11. In a real sense today those who are most at risk are most dependent upon your good judgment and integrity. The poor, the marginalized, the defenseless, and the neglected are those who turn to you with greatest need. Those of us with means, with access to the halls of power, and those with influence have others to assist them. But the poor are entirely dependent upon you to bring them a degree of the justice that our laws promise and guarantee.

When the *First Responders* came to those burning buildings, they looked for those who were hurt, stranded, and afraid. They attended to them first because their needs were greatest in a moment of extreme national tragedy. When the poor appear in your courts and offices, they are in the same condition and they need the same level of attention and compassion. You do not make the laws but it is your great responsibility to apply them fairly and with equanimity and prudence.

Sacred Scripture is often quite harsh in its treatment of judges and lawyers as today's Gospel passage suggests because the authors of the Bible saw in those who held such titles the great possibility of acting in God's name and in God's place when judges and lawyers exercised their duties. God, after all, is the true and eternal and perfectly just judge of us all. Those who act as judges can achieve a divine recompense by acting fairly and as God would act in judging their neighbors. Unfortunately, the converse can also be true and for that reason, the authors of the Bible often exhort those who are judges to be aware of their great responsibility and their noble charge.

The reason that we offer this annual Red Mass is first of all to pray for and with all of our lawyers, judges, and court officials irrespective of your own personal religious affiliation at the beginning of each judicial year. We want to honor and recognize your tremendous contributions to our community and to assure you of our prayers and esteem. We trust that our prayers and admiration will be a residual source of strength for each of you during this next judicial year. We also wish to remind you of the expectations of our entire community that you render to the best of your ability the safeguards of our laws to all of our people.

Each year the Thomas More Society of the Archdiocese of Atlanta hosts this special Mass and invites all of its colleagues and friends to join with them and me in praying for a successful and rewarding judicial term so that all of our citizens will experience security and justice rendered in all of the courts of our state, city, and counties. You are all our *First Responders* in the area of honesty and justice and your success redounds in the lives of all of us. Blessings on your labors and efforts throughout this coming year.