

RED MASS
January 16, 2003

Bishop DiLorenzo, Governor Lingle, Lt. Governor Aiona, Mayor Harris, Chief Justice Moon, Speaker Say, members of the state legislature, members of the city council, law enforcement officials, military leaders, clergy and religious leaders, fellow lawyers and friends.

Some of you will recall that the Lt. Governor spoke at last year's Red Mass. He didn't consider himself a politician at that time. And I accepted the invitation to speak at this year's Red Mass several days before the election unaware that I would soon be offered a job in a Lingle administration. I mention this lest anyone think that the Catholic diocese has been showing partisan colors. I also will mention that this just happens to be the proud former parish of Governors Bill Quinn AND Jack Burns.

This beautiful cathedral has distinguished itself in many ways, one being that Father Damien was ordained a priest 139 years ago right up there in the old sanctuary behind where Bishop DiLorenzo is sitting now. It is also distinguished by the many statues of saints you see looking down on us from the ledges above the columns.

In case you aren't sure, Catholics don't worship statues. Those statues just serve as aesthetic reminders of heroic men and women from a long and rich tradition -- Catholic success stories, so to speak.

I mention this because it is perhaps with a bit of gentle irony that one such statue -- a particularly big one -- stands just two blocks from here on the premises of another cathedral of sorts. I'm speaking, of course of the statue of Father Damien on the Mauka side of the state Capitol.

In the cathedral where we are now gathered, Catholics believe humanity lifts up its heart to the divine, and that the divine in turn touches humanity.

In the cathedral called the state Capitol, the hopes and aspirations of our people are heard by carefully chosen leaders who, in turn, labor for the good and well being of all.

At least those are the ideals to which both places aspire.

According to Bishop DiLorenzo, one of the reasons I was invited to speak today is that I am a Catholic. He also mentioned my legal background.

I sometimes describe myself as Catholic by birth. What I mean is that I'm a Catholic because my parents were, as were their parents and so on, going back as far as my brothers have been able to trace our family tree. Being Catholic for us was more than just having a religious label; it's also been our culture, a part of who we are.

Our parents never measured our faith by the number of Baltimore Catechism questions we could recite, though we did learn them.

Likewise, the good Sisters of the Most Pure Blood who taught us from kindergarten through eighth grade didn't test our goodness by the memorization of Scripture.

No. The Catholicism I remember and embrace as my heritage is a faith of action and good works. Simply stated -- and that's the only way it ever was expressed to us -- we had a sacred duty to treat others the way we wanted to be treated. "Love thy neighbor as thyself," is how the nuns put it.

We were made to realize that these words were not a warm platitude, or even a strong recommendation. They were a command -- in fact, a commandment (which, for reasons I don't know, is stronger than a command).

Our parents didn't talk much about doing good. They just did it.

Hearing what was expected of us was instructive. Seeing it lived by our parents was unforgettable.

My Catholic faith steered me to a Jesuit college and eventually to join the Jesuits themselves. I had sensed a calling.

To me, there is nothing mysterious about a calling, it's just a moment in time when for some reason you ask yourself, "If not me, who? And if not now, when?" But after a year in the Jesuits living under vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, I realized that call had been a wrong number. God had other plans in mind for me.

Namely law school.

Besides being easier than life as a Jesuit, I figured a legal career would give me a chance to help others, just like the nuns had commanded, and my parents had demonstrated.

Of course, in any walk of life one can succeed, or fail.

This is cleverly portrayed in an historical essay by Paul Carrington entitled "A Tale of Two Lawyers."

As suggested by the title, the essay contrasts the legal careers of two lawyers -- two American contemporaries who devoted much of their careers to public life, both of whom were also private lawyers. One was by anyone's definition a great success, the other a dismal failure.

I quote from Professor Carrington:

“One of them was born and raised near Beacon Hill in Boston. His father was a lawyer. He attended Harvard College and Harvard Law School. A Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States took a very special interest in his education. He was counseled by Ralph Waldo Emerson, by his distinguished seniors at Beacon Hill, and by most of the elite lawyers of his time, including Daniel Webster. If education alone could make a man a sound lawyer, then Charles Sumner should have excelled in our profession.”

“His rural contemporary was as a child moved from one impoverished farm to another. If things were not bad enough, his father was a lousy farmer. Cholera took his mother when he was seven. He once attended school for a few weeks, but that was all the formal education he ever received. When he was 29 years old, a judge found him to be of good moral character and certified him to practice law in the courts of Illinois. He was never an apprentice lawyer, he never had a mentor in law, and he never received any instruction except by experience. If academic achievement were essential to make a good lawyer, then Abraham Lincoln had no chance.”

“Lincoln practiced in an itinerant court, following it on horseback through the villages of rural Illinois. He contested over 1,000 trials, most of them involving such matters as a promissory note or the ownership of a hog.”

“Sumner practiced in Boston with the lions of the bar. He participated in dozens of large commercial cases litigated in the federal court in that city. Not only a Justice of the Supreme Court, but many family friends on Beacon Hill sent him clients.”

Yet as lawyers, Lincoln succeeded brilliantly and Sumner failed.

Why this happened had nothing to do with social status, academic attainments, or even raw intelligence. As Professor Carrington put it, “Sumner forgot more law than Lincoln ever knew.”

According to Carrington, a major difference was that Lincoln taught himself to see himself and the world through the eyes of others. Because of this, “he could recognize his own impulses.”

Sumner, on the other hand, took little interest in others, and was totally blind to how they saw him.

Lincoln was a natural wit, which won him affection and trust even by his adversaries. Sumner was humorless.

Lincoln spoke plainly with a goal of being understood. Sumner’s speeches were laden with obscure references and foreign terms that communicated little beyond his own bloated self-image.

Lincoln was a problem-solver. Sumner, constitutionally unable to compromise, reveled in generating hostility – his goal seemingly was more to win arguments than to solve problems.

Lincoln was willing to work very long hours to do what Carrington called "the necessary drudgery of the law." Sumner had no interest in that.

Ironically, Sumner embraced all the right causes -- peace, antislavery, prison reform -- but only on his terms, always claiming for himself the highest possible moral ground. Today, he might be called politically correct.

I use this tale of two lawyers because it resonates with my profession, but also because it is applicable to all who serve the common good.

Success in public service ultimately is not going to be judged by eloquent or even persuasive arguments, but by how we treat each other and especially how we treat the most poor and powerless among us.

How does one do this, and especially how does one avoid falling into the trap of thinking too highly of himself? In Lincoln's case, it was related to self-examination of his own inner-most thoughts and feelings. This sounds easy, but gazing at our own shortcomings can be a painful exercise.

Carrington wrote: "Critical examination of one's own irrationalities can be quite unsettling. Those who excel in that examination encounter many unwelcome discoveries of their own previously unrecognized prejudices. They learn that their ideologies, those secular faiths that help give them an identity, are less tenable than they would like to suppose. They learn self-doubt as well as self-confidence. They discern motives in themselves that are less handsome than those they would like to own. They learn that they are less clever than they hoped, but that their petty efforts can be seen in the grand scale of things to be an occasion for humor. All that is painful learning. We all prefer those comfortable illusions about ourselves that are today too often celebrated as self-esteem. But those comforts to which we cling are disabling to sound professional judgment."

I doubt even the Pope could have said it any better. (Is my Catholic culture showing through?)

I honor and applaud those of you here who have made sacrifices to serve the common good. I admire your commitment and hard work. As a novice myself, not a day goes by that I do not appreciate more and more the service you have provided year in and year out.

If I sounded a little preachy this morning, I apologize. Blame it on the trace cells of Jesuit blood that still run through me.

That said, I will close with the plainspoken words of a non-Catholic, non-lawyer whom I admire greatly, Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop: For those we serve, may we strive with humility, sincerity and simplicity to be “good and industrious” in all that we do.

Amen.