

# Homily for the Red Mass

03 February 2026

A little over forty years ago, whilst in my last year or two of high school, my fellow students and I were asked to choose somewhere of interest for a one-week work experience placement, the idea being that this experience would help us determine if the career we were focused on as 15 or 16-year-olds was truly for us. Without really having done any research, and perhaps wanting to avoid the noise and bustle of potential employers such as car repairers, panel beaters and machine operators, I asked to be placed with a firm of solicitors and so, forgive me, went on to experience the five most boring days of my life. Suffice to say, the mysterious world of legal practice didn't grab my interest and so I went on to become a teacher instead, finding more interest in dealing with the minds of seven-year-olds than in a room full of legal tomes which was, at the time, the totality of my understanding of the legal world . A career change has, of course, taken place since then.

I mention this only by way of highlighting my lack of knowledge of the legal world in any meaningful way, beyond the couple of very positive experiences I have had with solicitors over the past few years. But, of

course, this is certainly the case for most people in society. A call to a solicitor's office and a brief meeting or two to deal with a procedural matter, is about as much, I believe, as most people dip their toes into the deep and dark sea of the legal world. It is probably fair to say that more knowledge of the workings of the legal profession is gleaned from television shows, perhaps even correctly on occasion, than personal experience.

Having said that about the legal world, I think that there is a definite parallel with the Church. So many people's experience of the institutional Church is at a surface level, and often at a transactional level, at that.

But this raises an important question: how do large institutions, like the legal profession and the Church, to name the two most relevant to us this evening, demystify themselves so that the average "person in the street" can see that they exist not as entities concerned solely for their own existence and their own good, but as vehicles for public service helping to make society the best it can be, and, from the perspective of the Church, a reflection, imperfect as it may be, of the kingdom of God?

I believe the answer lies in the very nature of the Mass we are celebrating this evening, that is, a Mass of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the inspiration and driver for all that we do which accords with God's will, and God's will is for a world blazingly lit with justice, peace, compassion and harmony – all hallmarks of a perfect love. But the Spirit is effective only when it finds a home in us, giving us the ability to be the presence of Christ in the world today.

Being a Mass of the Holy Spirit, it is hardly surprising that we hear the Spirit mentioned more than once in our readings this evening. We hear of a new spirit being given to God's people by the Lord, a spirit which will bring about a renewed people, characterised by love, unity, and obedience to God. Our Second Reading speaks of some of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, namely selflessness, gentleness and patience, all wrapped up in the cloak of unity. Actively seeking to live out these virtues, no matter what our role in society, surely lends credibility and a genuineness to our work and relationships that might otherwise be lacking.

It is this manner of living which Jesus speaks of in our Gospel this evening, the famous Parable of the Sower. Though we don't hear the Spirit mentioned specifically, its work is implicit in those who make of

themselves rich soil by predisposing themselves to the movement of the Holy Spirit. It is such people who bear fruit for the kingdom, in Luke's Gospel a hundredfold, though Matthew and Mark speak of thirty and sixty as well as a hundredfold. Either way, it is only the rich soil that produces any sort of harvest.

But what does this mean practically? I would suggest it means that in allowing the Holy Spirit to move us each day, our work is imbued with a greater sense of purpose, a purpose that is kingdom-oriented. This means that even if I am merely responding to a phone call from a client, I am doing so because in responding to what may well be a rather pedestrian and dry enquiry, I am doing something that in its own small way contributing to the building of the kingdom. Let's face it, most of our professional lives, and lives in general, are spent undertaking fairly ordinary tasks. The glamorous side of the legal profession and the Church is only glimpsed from time to time, but that doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit is absent. The Spirit is there, inspiring us in those less exciting times, if only we open our hearts and minds to it and its call to us.

In doing this we are being the rich ground into which seed is sown to ultimately produce a rich harvest, as we heard in the Gospel, even

though we may not see the fruits for ourselves. One of the difficulties with working with people is that we do not always get to witness the fruits of our labours, but this should not deter us. Indeed, from a Church perspective, our pastoral work is quite often undertaken without seeing the effects of a conversation, a prayer, or a blessing that someone has requested.

In being attuned to the movement of the Holy Spirit within us as we go about our working lives, be it, for many of you here a more elevated role such as a judge or minister, a solicitor, a clerk or an administrator or student of the law, we can be confident that the relationships we build in our work will be positive ones furthering our mission as builders of the kingdom. This, in turn, will help institutions like the legal profession, to be seen as a force for good, not as a force interested only in its own existence and the benefits which flow from that. Such a manner of operating will also help demystify the workings of the legal profession as all the engagements with clients and others that have dealings with it will be undertaken in a manner which seeks to navigate their concerns in a way most meaningful and beneficial to them.

Of course, much more could be said about how the Holy Spirit can work in us to help make societal institutions even better vehicles for the building of God's kingdom, but it would be remiss of me not to mention the importance of human dignity, a key teaching of the Church. In being attentive to, and responding to, the Holy Spirit, we promote the dignity of every person we encounter. I am sure that in the legal profession, as with many others, people of all stripes are encountered from the most pleasant and amiable to the not-so-pleasant and uncooperative, but faith demands of us that all people are treated with respect and dignity, no matter the person or the circumstances. We are called to treat every person as though we were encountering Christ himself. In allowing the Spirit to shape us in this way, we will certainly help humanise institutions that can appear to outsiders as faceless and cold, to say nothing of helping us to be more truly the people God calls us to be.

To return to where I started this evening, I think that I ended up where I was meant to be. Believe me, my failure to have had my interest sparked during those five days in the early 1980s may well have been a good thing for the Australian legal profession. I like to think that I make a

better priest than I would have a legal practitioner – and I hope Bishop Vincent agrees!

Finally, thank you for all you do, no matter what your place is in the legal profession, to build the kingdom of God through the manner in which you undertake your various roles. I can only imagine that the burdens placed upon many of you in the administration of justice must at times seem too great to bear, and I pray that you will find the strength needed at such times to persevere.

I wish all of you a fruitful year ahead as you undertake your various roles in the field of justice, especially in western Sydney, and pray that you will, through listening to, and being attentive to, the Holy Spirit, be fruitful soil for the seed that God wishes to bear for all concerned an abundant harvest.