

"Jewish Prophets, Catholic Saints, Faith and Our Lives as Lawyers"

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Presentation to the St. Thomas More Society

November 12th, 2009

Recently a wonderful student, one who works with us at University Ministry at the University of San Francisco came up to me after Mass for the feast of All Saints saying that he did not believe the saints were models for him, or that he should aspire to be a saint as I had suggested in a short homily I had given! I thought his frankness refreshing, when I was his age I would have kept my mouth shut! When I asked him what he did aspire to, he spoke about wanting to be truly authentic, to be himself. And it was apparent to me, that as the ideal student at a Jesuit institution that he is, he wanted to be a person for others, committed to social justice and to God as a practicing Catholic.

Somehow, sadly, here we have a good Catholic who thinks the saints are something beyond him, that they belong on a pedestal in a church, and not as people we can relate to, as friends, as people who would inspire us to do great things for God.

I wish I had the time to have had a real conversation with him, because his ideas and values are, to my mind, so much what I believe it means to want to become a saint, except that somehow he has this false image that ordinary people, people like us could have nothing to do with the saints.

Perhaps this young man is right in a kind of way, for after all, wasn't it Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker, whose cause for canonization is now well under way, who once said she never wished to be called a saint as this would mean her message would not be taken seriously. Some day she probably will be called a saint in the formal sense of the word. Although it may take a very long time for I suspect that right now she is actively engaged in trying to sabotage her own cause!

And yet, here we are at a lunch with my dear friend Dean Jeff Brand, at a society named for a Catholic saint, Thomas More. Surely the saints must have something to say to us as lawyers? And I hope they have something to say to those of us who are priests also! Why bother to call your great society after a saint otherwise? Unlike Jeff I grew up in Liverpool, England, with practicing Catholic parents. Our faith was important to us, but we did not speak all that much about it. However as an Irish Catholic growing up in England, Thomas More was very much part of my upbringing, along with all the saints. The formally canonized saints such as More, and those included in the wider use of the word saint as in the communion of saints; meaning all those who have gone before us. Indeed in the sense St Paul uses the word, the living saints as well, which includes all of us who are alive so. During this month of November it is, as

you will know, traditional for Catholics to remember those saints who have gone before, which includes the canonized, along with all those we loved personally who are now with God.

I am an alumni of an English Jesuit school, Stonyhurst College, where the saints were very much part of all of our imaginations. Indeed, unusually we had several old boys of the school who were canonized, including St. Edmund Campion. On his feast day we had a high Mass with a large relic of the rope by which he hung placed on the high altar. This was followed by a formal dinner where we did something that would be impossible in this country, and only happened in this one day of the year, each school boy was served a glass of wine by the faculty. Doing that would be illegal in this country. Our library was named for Thomas More, his hat was in a prominently placed glass reliquary in the church sacristy; I even performed at school as the judge in Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons*. I recall a Jesuit, Fr. David Fleming, a warm man who spoke to us about the saints in terms that made them real, accessible, and the fascinating characters they truly are. Fr David presented Thomas More as a heroic person; as the wit, Lord Chancellor, scholar, father, man of deep conscience, and utterly loyal subject he was. But he did it in a way that made him accessible, not remote. We were invited to see More as a model for our lives; most especially in the way he was true to his conscience and God, ultimately whatever the price, even to death. This did not mean we had to be like More, we should strive to be saints in ways true to our own selves.

Another patron saint of lawyers, less well known is St Ives. I heard the suggestion he is also patron saint of hand lotions and creams, presumably because there is a product line with his name! I am not sure if this is true. In St Ignatius Church there is a stained glass window with Ives presented, given to the church by USF Law School students. Ives is seen with a purse in one hand representing all he gave to the poor, and a rolled paper in his right, representing his charge as a judge. The words Advocate of the Poor can also be seen in the window. Ives studied civil and canon law, and the poor were always his passion both as a judge and later as bishop. Ives incessantly pleaded pro bono for the poor on every opportunity, and he was also famous for helping people settle out of court and to reconcile. It is said that even those whom, as judge that he decided against, both respected and honored him. That must count as one of his real miracles, certainly if we are to judge by the standards of today in California. Indeed when Ives died in 1303, there was a version of an early lawyer joke placed on his tomb in Latin: "Sanctus Ivo Breto. Advocatus et non latro. Res Miranda populo." As a lawyer and member of the Irish Bar I hope you can forgive me for translating this, "Ives was a lawyer and a Breton. But not dishonest. An astonishing thing in everyone's eyes!"

CS Lewis in *Mere Christianity* states how monotonously alike are all the great tyrants and conquerors; but how gloriously different are the saints. More and Ives certainly are both models of holiness for lawyers, yet their personalities hugely

differ. As Pope John XXIII said in *Journal of a Soul*: "I must not be a dry bloodless reproduction of a model, however perfect. God desires us to follow the examples of the saints by absorbing the vital sap of their values and turning it into our own blood, adapting it to our own individual capacities and particular circumstances. Jeff has spoken of prophets in a similar way to how I want to speak of the saints. The Saints serve as prophetic witnesses for those who call themselves Christian that we might live more fully as Christian disciples as ourselves, with our own gifts and personalities; and not by trying to be someone we are really not. Thomas Merton says in *New Seeds of Contemplation*: "For me becoming a Saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self." Why, he asks, do we have to spend our lives striving to be something we would never want to be, if one only knew what we wanted. Today is the feast day of St Josaphat, Lithuanian Bishop and martyr, as well as the feast day of a host of lesser-known saints, each with their own unique and differing personalities. God called each of them to be truly themselves just as God calls us to be truly ourselves.

At the beginning of my talk I spoke of a student who could not see anything in the saints he would wish to emulate. Yet, as I said, without knowing it, this young man really desires to be holy and to be a saint in his way of living, his values and his faith. For all who practice as lawyers as for with others, including priests, the saints do not belong on a pedestal, remote, far from our everyday lives. What always comes across is their humanity. They experienced doubt, weakness, loneliness, and fear just like the rest of us. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury speaks of how important it is to capture the imagination of the young for faith. I am sure this is as important for young Jewish boys and girls as it is for young Catholic boys and girls; to have their imaginations captured and inspired by the lives of prophets and saints. As Robert Ellsberg says ultimately their lives were organized around higher principles, the human capacity for love, sacrifice, and generosity. Saints should be seen as authentic humans and not as perfect humans. The saints encourage and inspire us, not to become plastic replicas, but rather to work within our own individuality and our own humanity to serve God in our own way and in our time. As lawyers certainly we can be inspired of course most especially by More and Ives by being women and men of conscience with a deep commitment to social justice and the poor. But we have to do it as ourselves and not as Ives and More.

Next Monday at USF , November 16th there is a Mass and conference remembering the six Jesuits and their companions who were brutally martyred twenty years ago in El Salvador. Not canonized yet, possibly never, yet they certainly belong in my canon of the saints in the more general sense, and they were also prophets to my thinking. They were martyred because of how way they lived their lives, how they expressed their faith in love, standing as they did for a new kind of society beyond both capitalism and communism, standing as they did for a new church of the poor which confronted the violence and pervasive

injustice in El Salvador.

It is perfect timing then for the St Thomas More society to explore this topic of Jewish prophets and Catholic Saints at this lunch in November, when we remember all the dead, and next Monday especially the martyrs of El Salvador. Like St Thomas More they would have understood their deaths were the price of being truly authentic and human in their time and location. Let us give thanks for them, and for all the saints and prophets who inspire us to be truly ourselves and live up to the challenges of being lawyers who love God and neighbor in our time and location. For as the old catechism that we learnt at Stonyhurst told us, God made us to know, love, and serve him in this world, and to be happy with him in the next. The saints point the way for us to follow this in our own authentic way, in our own time and place.

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.