

**Remarks by Pennsylvania Bar Association President Matt Crème delivered  
at the Annual Dinner Meeting of the St. Thomas More Society of  
Central Pennsylvania on November 3, 2011**

I confess to a Groucho Marx moment being asked to speak tonight. Do I really want to be part of a Catholic organization that would chose to have me as the speaker at its annual dinner?

But here is a helpful perspective which I recommend to you for context. In his book **Testimony of Hope**, Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan uses the first chapter of Matthew's gospel as the basis for the first meditation; this is the genealogy of Jesus. He describes the twenty-eight generations from Abraham to Jesus as a "river of history, full of criminals and sinners" which "becomes a source of pure water [only] as we approach the fullness of time." Rather than scandalizing us, the fact that our official history doesn't hide the sins of our ancestors in faith is an exaltation of the mystery of God's mercy and of God's willingness to put imperfect and flawed people to His purposes.

I have been asked to speak on the role of faith in my life as a lawyer. So as imperfect and, flawed, as I am I offer the following in the hope that it suits His purposes.

*An official asked him this question, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus answered him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother. And he replied, "All of these I have observed from my youth." When Jesus heard this he said to him, "There is still one thing left for you: sell all that you have and distribute it to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." But when he heard this he became quite sad, for he was very rich.*

This is from Luke, but the same story is found in Matthew and Mark as well. It must teach an important truth to be recorded in all three of the synoptic gospels.

The gospel story continues.

*Jesus looked at him [now sad] and said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard this said, "Then who can be saved?" And he said, "What is impossible for human beings is possible for God."*

It is, as it always is and as it always has been, impossible for any one of us to be saved except through God's grace. "What is impossible for human beings is possible for

God.” How then do we as lawyers pursue our profession so we would merit that grace? For that we have the example of the saints.

But first:

Growing up in Berwick wasn't quite Lake Woebegone, but it was quintessential small town America, and in my end of town, it was full of European immigrants, many first generation in this country, and their children and grandchildren who were mostly Roman and Eastern Catholics with a large number of our cousins the Orthodox too. The culture was blue collar even for those who had advanced into white collar jobs as my Father did.

The sacred and the profane were both a part of everyone's life and especially if you were a guy it could be summed up in the words of the country song “five card poker on Saturday night, church on Sunday morning.” It wasn't any more complicated than that. No matter what you did Saturday night or how late you caroused you were in church on Sunday morning and then right after mass (for us Italian American men) to the Maria Assunta Society until you got the call for Sunday dinner.

For those who went from high school into the shop it never got more complicated than that. The Church required attendance at Sunday mass and that's it.

But for those few of us who went away to college and graduate school complications started. Well at Dickinson College in the middle seventies perhaps not so much. Many of the guys and most of my friends were Catholic kids just like me who came from a mill or patch town similar to Berwick. So it was still carousing on a Saturday night – Thursday, Friday Saturday nights - but church on Sunday morning. It was in law school at Georgetown that the Jesuits challenged me to find God in all things, and that included work.

How do you do that? Work is work and church is church. Especially for those of us who were blue collar kids and heard work hours defined by the shop whistle and church time by the bells. I was quoted in my PBA official profile as saying the Jesuits taught me that a person of faith could live a life of the mind. More than that, I learned that only a person of faith could sort through life's issues and plot a course to a fulfilling life's work.

This opened a lifelong study of the Church's social justice teaching and with my wife Diane, who also acknowledged only a juvenile understanding of Catholic teaching, we started learning and doing. We knew how fortunate we were and we taught our children by what we had learned and what we did.

*Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.*

Now back to the saints.

Our great patron sacrificed all he had and followed the Savior to a martyr's death. He did what the wealthy official found that he was unable to do. None of us expects or desires to face that kind of choice.

*One Sunday morning the preacher said "Everyone who wants to go to heaven stand up." The entire congregation stood up except old Brother John. Thinking that he had trouble hearing the preacher shouted "Everyone who wants to go to heaven stand up." But Brother John still remained sitting. So the preacher asked "Brother John don't you want to go to heaven when you die?" Brother John said "Oh, when I die. The way you were carrying on I thought you were fixin' to leave presently."*

But God loves us lawyers and in his mercy has provided us with a second, and perhaps more accessible patron.

In Saint Ives of Kermartin we have an example of everyday lawyering. Known as the Advocate of the Poor, this guy went to heaven for doing pro bono work.

He lived more than 200 years before Thomas More and he was both a civil lawyer and a canon lawyer noted for his representation of widows and orphans and other such needy folk. He died in 1303 and was canonized in 1347 at which time his tomb was inscribed with the Latin words:

*Sanctus Ivo erat Brito / Advocatus et non latro / Res miranda populo*

This translates as a 14th century lawyer joke:

*Saint Ives was a Breton, a lawyer and not a thief, a thing which astonished the people.*

It was probably an oldie, but a goodie even then!

The testimony at the inquiry in his cause for sainthood included the following statement from a fellow lawyer who knew Ives both as an advocate and as a judge.

*Ives without charge took cases for the poor, the widow, the orphans and other distressed persons, offered himself for their defense without being asked and thus was commonly known as the advocate of the poor and oppressed.*

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta has said:

*Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.*

A modern admirer of Ives has written that he was recognized a saint, not because he was a martyr, nor merely because he was a faithful servant, but because he lived consistently a life of service and sacrifice in the cause of justice. He pursued his career as an ordinary man amidst the very same everyday conditions of any lawyer of any time in any country and for this he is an example of an ideal attainable by any member of our profession.

As a land use and municipal law lawyer in my 31 years at Nikolaus & Hohenadel a large part of my practice has been representing non-profit developers of low and moderate income, senior and handicapped accessible housing. Together with those clients we have seen thousands of units of decent, safe affordable housing built and occupied across south central PA. I am also responsible for the erection of the first wireless telephone tower in Lancaster County and the first in York County and thereafter hundreds of cell sites across the eastern half of PA. You may see no connection, but as the in-house lawyer who first hired me said “I looked you up and you were an easy choice; you went to Georgetown and I went to Georgetown.” Never underestimate the Spirit.

As a leader of the organized bar I find myself in a position and on a stage from which I may advocate for the needs of the poor not only in the courtroom and municipal building, but also in the halls of Congress and in the State Capitol Building. I am able to join my voice with bar leaders from across our country and our Commonwealth lobbying for funding for legal services and encouraging volunteer pro bono service. At a time when the attitude in our nation is more one of “devil take the hindmost” I am able publicly and loudly to ask “and what about the least among us.”

These are small things which I assure you are done with great love, in the sure and certain knowledge that “*What is impossible for human beings is possible for God.*”