

**Red Mass Homily**  
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**Tallahassee, Florida**  
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I. Introduction

- A. Archbishop Wenski, brother bishops, priests, deacons, and religious, Gov. Scott, Lt. Gov. Carroll, distinguished elected officials, judges, members of the bar, and all those involved in the administration of justice, good, faithful Catholics from across the State of Florida, all friends in Christ: The wisdom of Solomon and of the Lord Jesus surrounds us as we participate in this 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Red Mass of the State of Florida. It is a wisdom replete with common sense but it is no common wisdom. It is in fact that wisdom for which we hunger and thirst in a nation that is badly divided, in a society ever more litigious, and in a world where human rights and freedom are ever more threatened.
- B. What do Solomon and the Lord Jesus have to say to us tonight? What guidance can figures who seem to hail from the distant past offer us as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century picks up its pace? I submit that they offer us a wisdom which enlightens our reason, thus enabling us to analyze the religious liberty threats our nation is facing and to acquire ourselves the wisdom necessary to address those threats.

II. The Wisdom of Solomon

- A. Let's begin with Solomon.  
A judicial decision may be said to be "solomonic" when it is a brilliant compromise that preserves the rights and values of all parties, or when it succeeds in bringing opposing parties to the table for a just resolution.
- B. Solomon could do those things but they were not the qualities that prompted the Queen of Sheba to visit him and present him with costly gifts. As we heard, during her visit, the Queen asked Solomon many subtle questions. Were they about trade and technology? Or the art of leadership and governance? We don't know, but what we *do* know is that the Queen was awestruck by Solomon's wisdom.

- C. Indeed, Solomon's real treasure was neither his wealth nor cleverness, but rather something hidden and intangible. Solomon had asked for and received from God the gift of 'an understanding heart' – i.e., a conscience that listened attentively to God's hidden, ageless wisdom. Because Solomon listened to the wisdom of God, he judged wisely and ruled his people in peace, justice, and prosperity.
- D. Stay with me as we think a little more about the notion of 'an understanding heart' for it is the rarest of treasures in a culture marked by continual political discord, and by never-ending struggles to assert one's power, opinions, and rights at the expense of others, even at the expense of our nation's most cherished values. Can a heart that listens to God's wisdom understand our complex secular world? And if it can do so, how do we acquire and maintain such a heart amid the competing demands of professional life in our highly polarized culture?

### III. Leaders Need an Understanding Heart

- A. In the interest of full disclosure let it be said that Solomon, in his advancing years, lost his understanding heart & instead succumbed to the foolishness and misery of sin. But in his prime, when he still listened to God's wisdom, he grasped the virtues and values at the heart of our common humanity. Listening to God, Solomon was also able to listen carefully to his subjects and so to judge them not by appearances but in accordance with truth and mercy.
- B. Solomon, of course, was not the only one to have an understanding heart. The same could be said of the founding fathers of our Republic. They were not only successful and learned, they were also wise for they too grasped something of the wisdom and love of the Creator. Thus could they proclaim:  
 "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."  
 Thus could George Washington teach us how religion contributes to political prosperity in a pluralistic democracy and urge that matters of conscience and religion be broadly accommodated. Thus could James Madison craft the Bill of Rights wherein religious liberty was ultimately listed as the first of the liberties to be protected.
- C. Understanding hearts. Listening hearts. Not perfect hearts. Not omniscient hearts . . . but hearts so attuned to God's wisdom that they founded a nation based on the dignity and rights with which the Creator endowed each person and they left us a framework for constructing a just, free, and humane society,

that is, a society which understands that life and liberty come not from the generosity of the government but from the hand of God.

#### IV. Hardened Hearts

- A. But today freedom is being undermined by some civic leaders and bureaucrats who have closed their hearts to an authentic understanding of religious liberty. Thus do they deny to individuals and to church-related institutions their God-given right to go about their daily work and to fulfill their mission in accordance with their convictions.
- B. For example, on January 20, 2012, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services decided that almost all private insurance plans, including those of Catholic employers, must include coverage for abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization, and contraception. An exemption was granted to churches which, for the most part, hire and serve their own members and do not reach out to the broader society. For the first time in history, churches and individuals are forced to purchase not only a commodity, but indeed a commodity that violates their teachings and the consciences of millions of Americans. Even those who disagree with the Church's teachings in these matters – such as the editorial writers of the *Washington Post* and *Newsday*— see this ruling as a violation of religious liberty, an infringement on the conscience rights of individuals and institutions that contribute immensely to the common good. Indeed the recent HHS mandate burdens the religious rights of church institutions precisely *because* they *do* seek to serve the common good! No willingness here to listen to God's wisdom about life and human dignity; no willingness to listen to the thousands of voices raised in protest after this ruling was first proposed by HHS in August 2011.
- C. The erosion of religious liberty has been underway for some time in culture and law but recently attacks against religious liberty have accelerated. In October I testified before the Subcommittee on the Constitution of the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee. The tenor of many of the questions directed to me indicated that some elected officials see the Church's teaching on marriage and family as a form of bigotry akin to racism and thus deserving of isolation and punishment. A bad state law in Alabama backed up by bad court rulings makes it illegal even for churches to provide Good Samaritan services to the undocumented. Catholic Relief Services and Migration and Refugee Services – two excellent agencies that serve victims of disasters and human trafficking – their cooperative agreements with the federal government were not renewed because they would not provide the full range of reproductive services, viz., abortion.

Hard are those hearts which seek to force religious people to violate their consciences and seek to diminish religious liberty at the expense of newly invented “rights” which have no textual basis in the Constitution or the Bill of Rights.

- C. Reflecting on these and other violations of religious liberty, I join you in the ardent hope that Amendment 8 to Florida Constitution will pass resoundingly, a religious freedom amendment which will appear on the November Ballot. In accord with the U.S. Constitution, this amendment provides that “...neither the government nor any agent of the government may deny to any individual or entity the benefits of any program, funding, or other support on the basis of religious identity and belief.” This captures the wisdom of our founding fathers who understood that religion is neither something evil nor something merely to be tolerated but rather a force that contributes greatly to human flourishing, to the moral fiber of society, and to the common good, by forming good citizens.

V. Acquiring an Understanding Heart

- A. In the Gospel, Jesus deals with what makes us unclean, that is to say, that which defiles, deforms, and hardens our interior lives. It isn't what we eat that defiles us, but rather those things that come out of us. Jesus' enumeration of those things reads like a who's who of contemporary vices: evil and impure thoughts and words, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, and folly. One might wonder if the Lord watched a lot of TV or spent time on the Internet!
- B. He didn't need to. In his human nature, Jesus is the perfect embodiment of the Father's wisdom. Truly God and truly man, the Lord Jesus understood what makes us tick and grasped better than we do how the vices he condemned undermine not only our personal lives but also the foundations of society, including and especially human dignity and freedom. So what remedy did Jesus offer us? What's the cure for these evils? Does he not invite us to listen to the truth of the Gospel? . . . not a truth which cancels out human reason or interferes with human development but rather a truth that enlightens reason and reveals our human dignity while shedding light on what constitutes a good society. For it is by listening to the Lord's wisdom, reflected in Scripture and Church teaching, that we gain a hearing in the public square for Gospel values and for the founding principles of our nation.
- C. Indeed, the world reveals itself to the silent listener.

The more silently one listens, the more one is able to perceive reality.

As Pope Paul VI once said:

“We learn from silence. If only we would once again appreciate its great value. We need this wonderful state of mind, beset as we are by a cacophony of strident protests and conflicting claims so characteristic of these turbulent times.”

D. So, Jesus continually calls us to conversion –

to open our hearts to Him as also to His truth and love,  
so that He might become the ultimate measure of our humanity.

This call to conversion is addressed to us all but in a special way to those in public life.

Last summer, Pope Benedict, reflecting on the wisdom of Solomon, said this:

“The moral conscience presupposes the ability to hear the voice of truth and to be docile to its indications.

People who are called to the task of government naturally have a further responsibility and therefore, as Solomon teaches, are in even greater need of God’s help.”

The more we listen to the Lord in prayer, the more we want to listen – and thus we grow in that wisdom and in those virtues that make us not only good Christians but indeed good public servants and good professionals – who are equipped to call our country back to its founding ideals . . . virtues such as courage and honesty, humility, perseverance, and prudence, all resting on the foundations of faith, hope, and charity.

This is how we acquire understanding hearts and invite others to listen with us.

To quote Pope Paul VI yet again:

“...modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses.”

E. Maybe we won’t change the whole world tonight but we might make a start, if, strengthened by the Lord’s wisdom and his Presence in the Eucharist, we continually seek to acquire and maintain that fresh spiritual way of thinking leading to truth, wisdom and freedom, expressed in a courageous defense of human life and dignity and in generous service to the common good.

May God bless us and keep us always in His love!