Thursday 8 October, 2015
Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
Atlanta, Georgia

The Red Mass

✠ Wilton D. Gregory
Archbishop of Atlanta

Each person that will present himself or herself in your courtroom, chambers, or your law office during this new judicial term will be expecting something from you. Perhaps they are looking for a second chance – or a third or even fourth. Some may be seeking redress for an injury, either physical or financial. Others may be looking for freedom and an ultimate release from a legal obligation or commitment. Whatever they are possibly seeking, they believe that you will be capable of delivering upon their request.

They will sometimes arrive at inconvenient moments and with a number of difficulties to satisfy their requests. Hopefully, few will approach you at the midnight hour like the friend in today’s Gospel – although for those of you who may preside at night court, that hour might usher in its own share of clients as well. People will come to you – whatever the hour – seeking justice, mercy and wisdom. But perhaps most importantly, they will come to you with hope.

That is why we come together to pray at the beginning of each judicial term for each one of you and your colleagues in the legal profession; that all of you will be blessed with the gifts of patience, prudence, impartiality, integrity and mercy throughout the countless hours that you will serve the Georgia community in the legal world. We pray that you will constantly merit and deserve the very distinguished and impressive titles that our society bestows upon you – Your Honor, Counsel, Judge and Magistrate. These titles represent the dignity of your offices and the lofty expectations of our society that freely confers them upon you. We believe that you are worthy of these titles, and that you will become ever more worthy with each prudent and wise decision that you render, or legal tactic that you recommend.

Your profession is not and has never been very easy. You will frequently be bombarded with requests that would tax even the most knowledgeable person among you – King Solomon himself might stand in awe at the complexity of the many cases you often decide. Yet, we trust God to bestow upon you and all of your colleagues a generous portion of the prudence and wisdom that has always resided in those who serve the common good and people everywhere.
We believe that as the Gospel writer Luke instructs us, we must all continue to pray with determination and persistence. Each year, we gather and ask the very same things from God for all of you and your coworkers. It does not indicate that these gifts of wisdom, prudence, mercy and justice are time-sensitive, but that our prayers should remain a constant reminder that our society continues to need our judicial servants to be always steady in their dedication to the pursuit of justice. Each year, we knock on the Father’s door and ask Him to help you strengthen our common home within the Georgia community with a sense of security and well-being throughout this new judicial term.

This year, our own Thomas More Society, the annual sponsor of this Mass and luncheon, has routinely chosen a number of distinguished jurists and public officials to honor who represent the highest standards of justice and mercy, and deserve the respect of our society. This particular year, that unfortunately has been so filled with extreme violence, unbridled hatred and overly publicized abrasive rhetoric; the Thomas More Society has chosen so wisely to recognize our neighbors in the city of Charleston, South Carolina as examples of mercy and healing. These two recipients probably would not have anticipated being so honored in Atlanta or anywhere else, since they acted out of the depth of their faith and public prudence in calling for a moment of healing within their own community and our nation. I could neither have recommended nor chosen a more deserving couple of people or individuals. Their pain is and was real and deeply personal. Yet their spirit of faith and generosity have inspired people throughout our nation and world. They have given public witness to mercy and the importance of community at a moment in time when most of us would have perhaps found these virtues impossible to exhibit.

Today, the presence of these two leaders from the City of Charleston enriches us across state lines and reminds us of the humanity and spiritual nobility we can all display when we act in accordance with our faith and the lofty principles of the common good, which should always be our motives. May each one of us find the courage to emulate their mercy and leadership every day of this new judicial term.