

## **History of the Red Mass**

The Red Mass is an adaptation of the Church's age-old expression of dependence on God to the peculiar needs and institutions of the Courts and the Law. In it we call upon God the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, to grant light, inspiration and guidance to those serving in the Legislative, Executive and Judicial branches of government.

The custom of a special Mass for the Bench and Bar arose principally in England, France and Italy in the early 13th century. The first recorded Red Mass was said in 1245 in the chapel of the Order of Advocates, La Sainte Chapelle, which was built by King Louis IX of France who was canonized as St. Louis. In certain localities in France, the Red Mass was celebrated in honor of St. Ives, the patron saint of lawyers, who was born in Brittany in 1253 and canonized in 1347. The custom ended in 1904 when the French Parliament, as part of the trend towards secularism, prohibited the celebration of the Red Mass.

In England, the tradition of the Red Mass began about 1300 during the reign of Edward I. The entire Bench and Bar attended the Red Mass together at the opening of each term of Court; the feast days of St. Hillary (January 11), Easter, the Trinity and St. Michael (September 29). Since the priest wore red robes, the judges of the High Court in Edward I's time, who were all doctors of the law, conformed to ecclesiastical tradition and also wore red robes. Therefore, the celebration became popularly known as the Red Mass.

Many scholars today maintain that the name has a deeper origin. The liturgical red signified the willingness to defend the truth inspired by the Holy Spirit even at the cost of shedding one's blood. Since the Mass asks the Holy Spirit to keep lawyers and judges alike true to the truth of justice, the devotion is called the Red Mass.

In Florida, the Catholic Bishops continue the Red Mass tradition, inviting the people who serve in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government to join them in prayer and ask the Spirit of God to guide and direct them in their service to the people of Florida.