

Remarks at the Annual Dinner of the Thomas More Lawyers' Guild of Toronto (following the 93rd annual Red Mass), September 14, 2017

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Your Eminence, Chief Justice Smith, fellow judicial colleagues, other distinguished public officials and officers, members of the Bar, articling students and law students, and all others here tonight in fellowship.

As we all know, the calendar year runs from January to December. But for many of us, the new year begins now. After the halcyon days of summer, with warm weather, caressing breezes and a little time off, we enter September renewed, recharged and ready to face the grind of normalcy.

It can be a grind, filled with stress and overwork. But much joy, satisfaction and accomplishment can be had.

In my view, to rise above the grind, we must keep one basic idea front of mind and actualize it all the time.

No, just for once I am not talking about the idea of the reasonableness standard in administrative law, *Dunsmuir*, *Alberta Teachers* and *Edmonton East* and all that.

Tonight, I'm going more fundamental, in fact to my guiding star, the idea that has always kept me going, the idea that has kept others going, the one that has been the secret of success for many the best of the legal profession and, frankly, the best of humanity.

The basic, fundamental idea? In all that you do, at all times, be a true human.

What do I mean by that?

Join me for a moment on a thought experiment. If you had to name one thing that defines a human, the one thing that distinguishes us from all other animals, what would it be?

Intelligence? Self-awareness? The ability to communicate? Well we are different from animals on those things only in terms of degree. We may be

more intelligent and more self-aware. We may communicate better. But those things do not really distinguish us.

I have two answers for you.

The first thing that distinguishes us from all other animals is that we worship God. *Deum Adora*. This is the caption on His Eminence's coat of arms.

My second answer is a little broader but it encompasses the worship of God.

We are the only species that participates in what I call intergenerational transfer and teaching. We teach each other, improve as a species, and teach and pass everything we know and have to the next generation. No other animal does this.

The human species develops social, cultural and technical know-how, values and insights and transfers all of it successfully to the next generation. For us Christians, the foremost values are our Christian values and the most meaningful insights are gleaned from our Christian faith.

As a result of intergenerational transfer and teaching, each generation of the human species builds on the last, correcting or improving from the last, enjoying a quality of life better and fairer than the last.

To be a true human—quintessentially human—you need to devote yourself to intergenerational transfer, to the exercise of learning and teaching.

This idea has two parts.

First, you must acquire, uphold, and exemplify the best of the previous generation. Centuries of past thoughts, discoveries and understandings are out there. Keep learning and developing, mastering it all. To take your area—law—there is no end to what you can learn and how high you can develop. The best lawyers have never stopped being great law students – forever humble about how much needs to be learned, ever keen to know more, always growing, never plateauing.

Second, you must take everything you get from the previous generation, develop and improve it, create more, and then teach it to the next

generation. As a species, we humans do this most effectively through institutions. Enter these institutions and make a difference.

So in the institution of the Church, be a great congregant, celebrant and volunteer. In the institution of the family, be a great parent. In your law office, be a professional in the best sense of the word. In institutions of government and business, be a leader in bettering our prosperity, fairness and justice. In educational institutions, be a donor of time and money. And everywhere, at every opportunity, be a great mentor and teacher.

If we do this, we will honour our predecessors who have given so much. And we will empower our successors who deserve so much.

Today, are we doing this? I really do wonder.

We live in an age of interconnection and interaction without face-to-face contact, swaddled by innumerable comforts, with a world of entertainment just a click or two away for just \$10 a month. I fear more and more that we are failing to be truly human, in the way I have described.

Rather I fear we are slowly morphing into a different species. The species?

Restful hamsters, confined, snoozing on a pile of wood chips or running in an exercise wheel going nowhere—either way being banal and inconsequential.

For a brief moment, let's explore more deeply this idea of true humanity—the idea of intergenerational transfer and teaching.

At the root of this is the idea of being a teacher. A teacher acquires the best of what we are and then transfers it to others. Here, I am including but going beyond teaching in a formal classroom sense. I include mentoring, an informal word here or there, or just wordless conduct that serves as a model to others to emulate.

Never estimate the power of teaching in these senses.

As Christians, we are inspired by the example of Jesus' disciples who began the task of teaching our Faith far and wide.

And many of us, on our own lives, can cite someone, either a teacher in a school or some other influential person, who altered the course of our lives.

For a moment, think of the science fiction idea of timelines. Shows like Star Trek speak of timelines, the way that events are supposed to unfold; and then some alien force, usually evil, comes from another time and changes the timeline, altering reality for the worse.

Is this just science fiction? No. In real life, teachers can alter timelines, but for the better.

Take this example. His Eminence, Cardinal Collins. I understand from his biography on the website of the Archdiocese of Toronto that he was a son of a legal secretary and he once considered he might be a lawyer.

Just think, what would have happened if this timeline unfolded. Today, some of you might have sat across from His Eminence at the official examiner's office refusing his discovery questions and loading him up with hours of undertakings! Over time, some of you might have even slapped him with a demand letter or two!

But the timeline did not unfold in that way. His Eminence's Grade 11 English teacher, Father Newstead, at Bishop Macdonell Catholic High School profoundly inspired him. This led His Eminence to the priesthood and his later progression to leadership in our community, with influence worldwide.

The intercession of one person, perhaps divinely inspired, altered His Eminence's timeline. As it happened, the person was a formal teacher. But just as well he could have been a colleague, supervisor, boss or even just a passing acquaintance of lasting influence.

Can the fluttering of the wings of a butterfly cause a chain of events that leads to a hurricane? I don't know. But think of His Eminence and his calling. One person. The benign influence of another. A life altered. A community richer and improved. A world bettered.

With this in mind, let's move now to the practical.

There are 10,080 minutes in a week.

That junior in the office who seems untutored and drifting? The legal secretary with a troubled child? Give them 15 minutes a week or maybe, just one long session of 60 minutes.

That motion just served on you? 30 minutes on the phone at the outset to plan an orderly way ahead.

A speech at a community organization or a lecture at a school? Mere minutes of effort but the equivalent of hours' worth of learning from someone without your experience and capability.

Inviting a student along to a meeting? That's zero minutes of your time but the equivalent of hours of learning to the student.

Worried about a legal or political issue and want judges or politicians to get it right? Spend 60 minutes a week over ten weeks and publish that legal commentary or op-ed article. Or spend just 30 minutes in a single day and blog it.

Some teachings and messages run the risk of controversy, the causing of causing discomfort to others, or unpopularity. But the teachings and messages must still be given. In these cases, you must have courage.

Recall St. Peter. Our Lord told him that before the crowing of the rooster in the morning he would deny knowing Him three times. Three times he was asked if he knew our Lord. Three times he lacked courage and, to avoid controversy or offence, denied knowing Him. And upon the third time the rooster crowed. We all know that story. But from there, remember that Peter later had courage and spread the Word far and wide, and changed the world. Without courage on his part, nothing would have happened.

Sometimes a controversial or unpleasant message must be taught. But there are well-known ways to minimize the harm to oneself. For example, one must choose the right moment, a time that teachers call a teaching moment. Sometimes it's best done by a series of acts or messages leading up to the big message. Remember that two people operating in synergy can often achieve more than ten operating in solitude. To depersonalize the message, use a lawyers' group, like this Guild. But regardless of the methods you might adopt, sometimes a controversial message has to be delivered with the possibility that some may dislike you or even attack you.

Is the solution to always avoid teaching a controversial or unpleasant message? For the listless hamster, that's the perfect solution!

Yes, hamsters are cute and furry. But they only do things that will not harm them; hamsters have no courage; do not be a hamster.

And remember this: nothing truly meaningful has ever been taught or achieved from a place of comfort.

Thomas More took the ultimate risk in pursuing the highest principle and suffered for it, teaching us a lesson that echoes through the centuries. No one here will likely be called upon to take such a risk as his.

But there will be times when to be true to yourself, to be truly human, you will have to take a risk, hopefully a sensible one, a risk you've mitigated to the extent possible.

Sometimes of more impact than these high profile, controversial things are the smaller, almost invisible things. Those things that teach the message of caring, fellowship and belonging—a message we must transmit to this generation and the next. Not just the small practical things I said earlier that take a few minutes. I'm talking about even smaller things, like making the effort to help a stranger carry a heavy package, assist someone in need up the stairs, or hold a door open for a person.

On the door opening thing, I have to confess to a guilty pleasure. Sometimes in the path underneath the Bay Street towers, amongst the scurrying mob during rush-hour, I will quite obviously stop and hold a door open for someone a few paces behind me. Then, I drop back to watch.

And you know what unfolds? At least half the time, the person I held the door for stops and holds the door for another. And then more often than not, another does it for another, and so on. Try it yourself. You will see: true humanity is a really virulent contagion.

Recall the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. But until you do something unto others, even something small—until you teach in the small sense I am suggesting—nothing will happen unto you, or to unto others.

In conclusion, I wish you all well and much success and happiness during this working year. And let's all try to be one thing—a true human.

Thank you.