

## PASSION FOR JUSTICE

Pompeyo Diaz

*(There rarely comes a time in the history of an institution when a tribute is paid to it in an unforgettable manner. That time has come for the Ateneo Law School and its graduates. Classic, inimitable, grand, immortal — that is how we describe this piece of legal literature which we hereby record for posterity. — Ed.)*

We are not here to celebrate the successful ending of your course in the law. We are here to send you on your way because from here, you will commence your profession in the law. We hold these commencement exercises, therefore, to say good-bye to you and to wish you well on your journey.

The closer a man approaches the sunset of his years, the more often his mind returns to the remembrance of things past. For to every man, if he lives long enough, there comes a point in life when he realizes, not without sadness, that there may no longer be time to climb new mountains. And that is when dreams begin to yield to memories as if reliving the past can somehow fill the void left by the flight of dreams.

It is more than fifty years since I sat where you sit now, an acolyte at the altar of the law. But the lengthening shadows of life only make the recollection of it as fresh and clear as if it were only yesterday.

I was given the privilege of addressing you one last time. I will do so, no longer as your teacher, but as a friend. But let me take a vantage point from which I can speak with some candor. As your own sun is rising in the east, mine has long since passed the point of high noon, and in the gathering dusk, I see you within the perspective of time. There are landmarks which I have beheld but which are still hidden from your view.

Some forty years ago, I took my oath of office as Judge of the Court of First Instance for the Province of Rizal in the chambers of a Justice of the Supreme Court. This was my first appointment to the bench. You know I had several. It was an occasion for deep pride in my family especially when the appointee was hardly thirty-five years of age and the Justice administering the oath to him happened to be his own father.

After the oath-taking, my father took me in his own car and drove me to the court-house in Pasig. He led me into the building, up the stairs to the second floor, and walked with me to the door of the sala which would now be mine. He stood by the door and let me enter alone. I did, and I went straight to my desk. There I saw a piece of paper upon which were written in Latin, in my father's own handwriting, those awesome words which must have shaken the walls of the Senate of ancient Rome: Let Justice be done, though the heavens fall!

In a lifetime devoted to the study of the law, these words still do not fail to stir up in me emotions which should have long since been spent, memories which should have long since been put to sleep, questions which should have long since been laid aside. What is the law? What is the truth? What is justice?

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## Errata:

*Our apologies to Justice Eduardo Caguioa for the inadvertent omission of his name from the Faculty List of the two immediately preceding issues of the Ateneo Law Journal.*

*Editorial Board  
and Staff*

What is justice? It is to render to each man what is his due. What is the truth? It is that which you seek, and keep on seeking, so that you may render to each man what is his due. What is the law? It is the instrument by which you discover that which you have been seeking so that you may render to each man what is his due.

The answers seem such simple directives for everyone to follow. The reality, however, is different. For, the law may be twisted to hide the truth in the same way that the truth may be distorted to ridicule justice. There are men in any society who are so self-serving that they try to make the law serve their selfish ends. In this group of men, the most dangerous is the man of the law who has no conscience. He has, in the arsenal of his knowledge, the very tools with which he can poison and disrupt society and bring it to an ignoble end. Against such a man, you must be fearless and indomitable, since to grant him victory is to deny yourselves the sanctity of your oath and the grandeur of your vision.

Such men I have met in my lifetime, both in the courtroom and outside it. Society's declared protection against such predators is the court of law before which all men are presumed to stand equal, whether mighty or weak. The integrity of the court is the foundation upon which a just society is established. Without this integrity, the vicissitudes of history will blow society towards the treacherous reefs of destruction and suck it into the whirlpool of oblivion.

A man of the law with a conscience, on the other hand, is the means by which a nation fashions for itself a just, orderly and civilized society, where the least of its citizens can stand proud in his human dignity, and where justice is the yardstick by which the citizen measures himself in his relationship with others and with his God.

Yet, a man of the law should have more than just a conscience. Conscience, too, can be dulled by exigencies in one's life. He may just seek a livelihood from the law. Then, no matter how financially successful he becomes, and no matter how much expertise he acquires in the law and its practice, he remains no more than a craftsman. He rises no higher than the humble plumber or mechanic from whom we expect nothing beyond an honest day's work and an honest charge for work performed, and to whom we would not dream of looking for leadership, guidance, and inspiration. He reduces law to a trade and himself to a mere huckster of legal skills.

What a man of the law should possess is a passion for the truth, a passion for justice. This passion should be of such a magnitude as to give him the power to stand firm when those around him seem to be going mad. It should be of such solidity as to grant him the strength to stand alone when all else is turning into dust. It should be of such perseverance as to infuse him with a loneliness that only those who have a vision can endure. It is a passion to keep alive that eternal challenge that justice must be done whatever be the cost.

You are not only men of the law. You are men of vision. Underlying all that you have learned here at the Ateneo is the never-ending theme of passion for the truth, of passion for justice. Your vision is forged here, and that vision is what makes you unique among your peers. You do not know yet what life has in store for you, but never sacrifice your vision on the altar of expediency. For without this vision, you shall become hollow inside, you shall become men without souls preying on the innocence and helplessness of your fellowmen. You shall become the unscrupulous auctioneers of history whose honor is on the block, ready to go to the highest bidder.

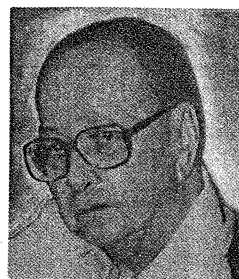
On the other hand, if truly you remain faithful to your vision, then you are a boon to society. You will gaze without favor upon your fellowmen, sifting through facts to arrive at the truth, seeking truth to render justice. The mighty and the weak shall stand naked before you, for they shall draw strength from your knowledge of the law and from your commitment to the truth. Then and only then, shall justice truly prevail and upon this earth will shine a piece of heaven. For, what is justice but an attribute of God Himself?

Walk firm, therefore, and walk with courage, upon this path you have chosen. Let your vision guide you. The law is a noble profession, and it is professed by noble men. See to it that you earn that nobility by acting as your fellowman's shield and protector against injustice and oppression.

As future lawyers, you have your tasks cut out for you. You need have no fear that they will prove too much for you if, in taking them up, you bear always in mind that doubt is the beginning of wisdom, that humility is the grace of the wise, that compassion is the virtue of the strong and, above all, that reason is the life of the law, and that the service of justice, which is nothing more than the search for the truth, is one of man's noblest achievements.

Farewell! May you always, in your quest for a better world, walk in the shadow of Him who gave you life and honor.

*(Address delivered at the Commencement Exercises of the College of Law, Ateneo de Manila University, on March 25, 1981.)*



Justice DIAZ

Pompeyo Diaz was born in Manila some 78 years ago. He graduated at the Ateneo de Manila in 1922 with a degree of Bachelor of Arts, magna cum laude. He finished law as class valedictorian at the University of the Philippines in 1926. He has held responsible positions in the government, foremost of which was that of Presiding Justice of the former Court of Appeals. He has been a professor of law at the Ateneo for the past 26 years. As one writer puts it, he is "Ateneo's pillar of a civilist."