**2020 Rail Supply Chain Summit**

**Diolkos Award Remarks**

Delivered by Dr. Robert E. Martinez

October 15, 2020

I wish to thank Mary Elisabeth and Michael Kearney for having recommended me and supported me for this honor. I don’t know who else was in the review process; but thank you. This is exceedingly kind.

I was asked to make a few remarks, and I ask the indulgence from two Norfolk Southern colleagues in attendance today who have heard much of my story.

I’m a child of the Cuban Revolution. My family fled Cuba a year and a half following the takeover by Fidel Castro. I was not quite five.

In their enormous wisdom, my parents recognized that what was coming was Communism and an end to freedom.

We lived on a sugar plantation, in the middle of nowhere, miles from Cienfuegos, the closest city. The plantation was called “*Central Soledad*,” which means Solitude—and that it truly was. The plantation had been owned by an American family, who had been in Cuba for over a hundred years. By the time the Communists arrived, the American were long gone and my father was the highest ranked Cuban still on the property. He was taken by the Communists and detained overnight. Forced to acknowledge the expropriation, when the plantation was stolen from its rightful owners, my Dad told Fidel’s goons that he was signing their documents only under duress.

When we left Cuba, it was before Bay of Pigs, and before the Missile Crisis; and the immense majority of Cubans remained at that time—as did most Americans—enthralled with Fidel—“Cuba’s savior.” Virtually all of my parent’s friends turned against them as “Traitors to the Revolution”.

We left everything behind. We traveled to the US under tourist visas and only with two suitcases—as if we were coming for a holiday. Anything of value, including sentimental value, like treasured family photos, was left behind out of concern that if stopped on our way out, it would have betrayed that were not planning to return.

When the visas expired, we traveled to the US Consulate in Toronto and solicited permanent residence. Conditions in Cuba had greatly deteriorated by early 1961 and the request was immediately granted. In fairly short order, we ended up in midtown Manhattan—which as you might guess, was a bit different from *Central Soledad*.

Eventually we moved to a one-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn, where my brother and I, along with a cousin who got out later, the three of us, slept in the living room. We didn’t own a

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car; nor a great number of other things one takes for granted. But, this is not a rag to riches story, for we were never poor. We always had food on the table, lived in freedom, worshiped as we saw fit, and that is how we defined the richness of our lives. My parents did what they had to do—and never looked back.

Years later, new American friends would comment to my parents, “oh, it must have been very difficult to leave everything behind.” My Dad would say, “no, actually, it was very easy, because once we realized that what was coming was Communism, the decision was very simple. We had to get out.”

The experience of the Cuban Revolution, in some respects, has defined my life. Prior to the Revolution, my family had not in any way been political, but they had a *profound* love of freedom and a deep faith in God. Having gone through that struggle; at home growing up, what was going on politically and socially became an ever-present topic of conversation at dinner; and, we were always taught to speak the Truth and not to fear the consequences.

I also can attest–-unequivocally—that I have lived and continue to live, the American dream*.*

Having experienced the impact of evil and the repercussions of deceit, I have always understood that ideas matter and have consequences. In a democracy, I am comfortable with the battle of ideas. That’s why we have elections.

Words have meaning. And, their meaning is unchangeable. A person of virtue speaks clearly—that person’s **no means no, and her yes means yes.**

I believe in the existence of Truth, a Truth that is knowable. A Truth that is unchangeable. It is not malleable. And, it is expressed through language; language which is clear and understandable.

In the early 1980s, during the period of my doctoral work at Yale, a visiting scholar, French philosopher Jacques Derrida, the architect of Deconstruction, became all the rage among aspiring intellectuals and young professors on campus. In Deconstruction, language never actually means what it appears to mean. Even during my years at Yale, I realized how corrosive such an approach would be to the transmission of knowledge. Only in later years, have I come to see how insidious this attitude has become and how utterly destructive it is to societal cohesion, civic institutions, the rule of law and, in fact, to Truth itself.

We are made in the image and likeness of God. I look about this room, and see a room filled with the spark of divine fire that resides in each one of us.

We are all called to holiness. There are a few, like Albert Schweitzer or Theresa of Calcutta, who reflected heroic virtue. Most of us are called to a more mundane level of accomplishment.

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Sister Faustina Kowalska wrote that “a soul’s greatness consists not in great deeds but in great love.”

We need to strive for holiness where we are, in the corporate board room, the judge’s chamber, or the classroom.

The call to holiness*,* I believe, is to find God in the ordinary, not in the extraordinary. It is in the ordinary of everyday life where we need to seek holiness; the ordinary events that touch your child, or your sister; or the word of encouragement you offer to a colleague. If you can seek God in the ordinary, sanctity is within reach.

Evangelist Matthew Kelly contends that we each are called to be **the best version of ourselves that we can be.** I know I can’t be Mother Theresa, but I know what the best version of me is like, and I know I can achieve that if I set my mind in right order.

Pope John Paul wrote that “We are living in a crisis of truth, . . .” in which we are granting each individual “the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil . . .”

Our culture has transformed the conception of conscience into a subjective determination of one’s own Will, and unrelated to objective Truth. One’s own Will eventually transforms into *Will to Power*. I have seen that play out before. It is not pretty.

We live in an age of profound confusion. I challenge all of us to **dare to be countercultural.**

Thank you for this honor and for indulging me this afternoon.