

**HOMILY FOR THE DEANERY MASSES OF WELCOME FOR
THE MOST REVEREND THOMAS JOHN PAPROCKI
NINTH BISHOP OF SPRINGFIELD IN ILLINOIS**

Effingham Deanery

St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Teutopolis
7 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 1, 2010

Alton Deanery

St. Boniface Parish, Edwardsville
7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 7, 2010

Jacksonville Deanery

St. John the Evangelist Parish, Carrollton
7 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 8, 2010

Litchfield Deanery

Ss. Mary and Joseph Parish, Carlinville
7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 9, 2010

Decatur Deanery

Holy Family Parish, Decatur
7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 23, 2010

Quincy Deanery

St. Peter Parish, Quincy
7 p.m. Monday, Sept. 27, 2010

Springfield Deanery

St. Joseph the Worker Parish, Chatham
7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2010

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good to be with you for this eucharistic celebration, which is one of the Masses of Welcome that I am celebrating this month in the seven deaneries that make up the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. This is my opportunity to get out to the regions of the diocese across the twenty eight counties of central Illinois to get to know you and to give you an opportunity to meet your new Bishop in person.

Since my Installation as your new Bishop on June 22nd, many people have already reached out to make me feel at home. I am indeed happy to call Springfield my new home.

Because my Installation at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Springfield took place on the Feast of the English Martyrs, Saints Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher, I have asked the priests of the diocese to use both my first name, Thomas, and my middle name, John, at the point in the Eucharistic Prayer during Mass where you pray for your Bishop, in part as a remembrance of my father, who was named John, but also as a way of continuing to implore the intercession of these great saints, Thomas More and John Fisher.

St. Thomas More has been a special patron saint for me. We have both shared the name Thomas, both have been trained and worked as lawyers, and both have held the office of Chancellor. Because St. Thomas More is the patron saint of politicians and lawyers, he is also the patron saint of many civic officials and others who work in our state capital. St. John Fisher provides a noble example of a brave bishop who gave courageous witness to the Catholic faith. May both of them help me in ministry.

It is fashionable these days for organizations to have mission statements and vision statements. The Mission Statement for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois can be found on our diocesan website:

Loved and chosen by God
we are the Catholic Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.
Through Baptism,
we share responsibility
for continuing the mission of Jesus.
We are called
to be a community
whose members enable and support
the gifts given to each by the Spirit.
We are sent
to make Christ visible in our world
through worship,
proclamation of the Word
and service to all God' people.

Our diocesan mission statement rightfully refers to continuing the mission of Jesus. Where do we find that mission? The mission of Jesus Christ is clearly stated in the Bible, and you can find the citation to the scriptures on a sign often seen at football games and other sporting events: *John 3:16*. You've

probably seen the sign. Just what does *John 3:16* say? Let me quote it for you: “Yes, God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him may not die, but may have eternal life.” The next verse specifies that mission even further: “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”

Since the Church’s mission comes from the Lord Himself, we are not free to change it without altering the very nature of why we exist and why the Catholic Church has continued to exist for over two thousand years. In terms of a vision statement, not only do we have more freedom to articulate how we see that mission being carried out in practical terms, but we have a responsibility to use our imaginations and creative energies to design the ways that we will continue to proclaim the Good News and make the Gospel message a lived reality in our world.

So what is my vision as the Bishop of this diocese?

- I see a local Church where Catholics take their faith seriously, seek to grow in virtue and holiness, go to Mass every Sunday and participate regularly and actively in the sacramental life of the Church and the activities of their parishes; love God with all their

heart and mind and soul and love their neighbor as themselves; bear witness to Christ in their daily lives; and promote respect for all human life from conception to natural death.

- I see a diocese where there is an abundance of vocations of young people willing to answer God's call to follow Him and dedicate their lives to carrying out His mission in the world; where there are sufficient priests to staff our parishes and serve their parishioners with virtuous commitment and impeccable integrity; devoted deacons, nuns and religious brothers dedicated to teaching the faith and caring for the sick, the poor, and the dying.
- I see communities where family life is valued, homes with a mother and a father who love their children and whose children love them; parents who educate and form their children and themselves in the Catholic faith.
- In short, I see a glimpse of God's Kingdom already foreshadowed in the life of the Church and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet in the Eucharistic feast.

All of this might sound like Utopia and in many ways it is admittedly idealistic. The fact that goals are lofty does not make them unreachable. Everything that I have described is attainable.

So what stands in our way?

The only real obstacle that prevents this vision from becoming reality in fact is *sin*. Original sin is our inherited condition not as some sort of communicable disease, but it affects us more like beneficiaries of an estate whose ancestors squandered a fortune. We have to live with the fact that the spiritual treasures of paradise were forfeited by our human ancestors. While Christ's death and resurrection have restored the gifts of heavenly treasures for us, we also have to recognize that the devil, Satan, is real, and he will do everything in his power to deflect us from our goal, which is eternal life on high with Christ in His kingdom.

This reality should neither frighten us nor lead us to despair, for Christ is more powerful than Satan. Christ indeed has conquered sin and death. That is why it is good to remember the Prayer to St. Michael, which used to be prayed after every Mass and which we could still pray beneficially for our spiritual well-being:

*Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle;
Be our protection against the wickedness and
Snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do you,
O Prince of the heavenly host, by the power of God,
Thrust into hell Satan and all evil spirits
Who prowl about the world for the ruin of souls. Amen.”*

In sum, it should be apparent that I am not describing so much a vision of what I am going to do as your bishop, but what we can do together as the Body of Christ. To paraphrase the inaugural address of President John F. Kennedy almost fifty years ago, “Ask not what your Church can do for you; ask what you can do for the Church.”

The Church already does a multitude of good for you, thanks to God’s grace. The Church is the river of God’s boundless love. The Church is the font of sacramental life provided by Christ Himself. The Church is the vehicle of our eternal salvation. The Church holds the keys to God’s kingdom entrusted by Christ to Peter and the apostles. It is all there for the taking as pure gift from God.

How will we respond? That, my friends, is up to each one of us. I pray that everyone will respond to our Lord's gracious invitations with willing hearts in loving freedom.

When I was named a bishop by Pope John Paul II seven years ago, I chose an Episcopal motto that reflects this truth: *Lex Cordis Caritas*, Latin for, "The Law of the Heart is Love." Sacred Scripture teaches this clearly. In chapter 31 of the Book of Jeremiah, the prophet tells us that God has written His law on our hearts. In chapter 13 of the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul says that love is the fulfillment of the law. To depict this visually, my coat of arms has two scales of justice to reflect my background in civil law and canon law, but above them both is the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On the cross, from His heart, He poured out for us His unconditional love and divine mercy. The Preface for the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, says: "Lifted high on the cross, Christ gave his life for us, so much did He love us. From His wounded side flowed blood and water, the fountain of sacramental life in the Church. To His open heart the Savior invites all men, to draw water in joy from the springs of salvation."

So, I see my primary task as bishop is to love you, more precisely, to radiate Christ's love with the help of God's grace throughout the twenty-eight counties of central Illinois that comprise the State of Illinois.

I look forward to visiting the towns and parishes of central Illinois and meeting the wonderful people of this diocese. On occasions such as administering the Sacrament of Confirmation, it has become customary for me to sing a song in my homily. Since many of you were not able to attend my Installation Mass last June in person, tonight I would like to conclude with the song that I used for my inaugural homily in Springfield.

This song is by Brian Littrell, who achieved success as the lead singer for the Back Street Boys. Brian Littrell got his start in vocal music as a boy singing in his church choir. He now writes and performs Christian music, and he has written this song called, "Jesus Loves You." This sums up my whole message as a bishop.

All my life I've heard Him say

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

I dropped down on my knees to pray

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

I asked Him to come into me

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

From Him He gives eternity

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Yes He does

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Say yes He does

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Yes He does ...

For the Bible tells us so

You need to look inside yourself

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

You can't take with you all your wealth

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

He will give to you an inner strength

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

He walked on water but you will sink

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Yes He does

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Say yes He does

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Yes He does ...

For the Bible tells us so

Said He's the One that died for me

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

And that's the reason I believe

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

And He has done the same for you

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

So watch and see what He can do

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Yes He does

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Say yes He does

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Yes He does ...

For the Bible tells us ... so