

**Springfield Diocesan Council of Catholic Women 2011 Convention
Keller Convention Center, Effingham, Illinois**

September 28, 2011

**+Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, dear sisters in Christ:

This past Sunday we heard the passage of the Gospel of Saint Matthew in which Jesus relates a brief account of a father's encounter with his two sons. The first son accepted his father's request to work in his vineyard but did not do it; the second son refused his father's request to work in his vineyard but later fulfilled it (cf. Matthew 21:29-31).

This past weekend Pope Benedict XVI embarked on an apostolic visit to Germany, his fatherland, and reflected on this Gospel passage. Considering the first son who said he would labor but did not, the Holy Father said:

Translated into the language of the present day, this statement might sound something like this: agnostics, who are constantly exercised by the question of God, those who long for a pure heart but suffer on account of their sin, are closer to the Kingdom of God than believers whose life of faith is "routine" and who regard the Church merely as an institution, without letting it touch their hearts, or letting the faith touch their hearts.

These words should make all of us stop and reflect, in fact they should disturb us. However, this is by no means to suggest that everyone who lives in the Church and works for her should be considered far from Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Absolutely not! On the contrary, this is a time to offer a word of profound gratitude to the many co-workers, employees and volunteers, without whom life in the parishes and in the entire Church would be hard to imagine.¹

These words of the Holy Father resonate well with the theme of your 2011 Convention: Rejoice and Renew.

With your pastors, I rejoice today in the many blessings the Lord has bestowed upon this local Church through your many good works and prayers throughout the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. What Pope Benedict said is true: without the women who make up the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, life in the parishes of this Diocese would be hard to imagine!

So much of your work is done quietly, behind the scenes, as it were, and for this reason you are not often thanked enough for your generous assistance in the work of the Church. Through you, my dear sisters in Christ, “the Lord has done great things for us [and] we are filled with you” (Psalm 126:). On behalf of your pastors and in the name of the entire Church, I am grateful for the loving help

you provide day in and day out in your many and varied apostolates; thank you.

Even as I rejoice with you today, I rejoice particularly because of your renewed emphasis on supporting and encouraging vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life. As you know, our Diocese currently has twenty seminarians – a number we have not seen in at least as many years - preparing in five different seminaries. These men come from a variety of backgrounds and cover a range of areas. Please, remember them each day in your prayers and ask the Lord to sustain them with the gift of his peace.

It has also been my privilege and joy as diocesan bishop to have received into the novitiate and to have celebrated first vows of religious profession of several young women in our diocese. Their affirmative response to God's call is encouraging and inspiring in our current cultural climate that questions such commitments.

As you know, these men and women have not simply fallen out of heaven. They have come from within your parishes and from within your families. I ask you not only to pray for the seminarians, postulants and novices that we have now and for the Lord to raise up more for us, but to actively help us find more seminarians and

candidates for our convents in the future. If you know of a man whom the Lord might be calling to service as a priest or a woman to consecrated life, please suggest it to that person and send his or her name to the Office for Vocations. We must cooperate with the Lord in the work of vocations. Please pray that God will give more young men and women the grace, courage and strength to say “yes” to His call to follow Him.

Let us now return to the first part of Pope Benedict’s reflections. He warns of growing lukewarm in the practice of the faith, which is a temptation for everyone, clergy and laity alike. He warns of living within the Church but without letting her touch our hearts, or without letting the faith of Jesus Christ touch our hearts.

This temptation toward descending into a lifeless routine of practicing the faith must be avoided at all costs. The Christian life is not simply about keeping to a certain moral and ethical code; living a moral life is certainly necessary and important, but this is borne out of a relationship with Jesus Christ. He calls us to love him by being true to his word and in return he will come to us and make his dwelling within us (cf. John 14:23).

It is the indwelling gift of his Spirit that enables to rejoice always in the faith that comes from the Gospel and to be ever eager to renew our faith in him who was crucified and is now Risen from the dead. Through the Sacrament of Confirmation the Paraclete, that is, the Holy Spirit, has been given to us and it is he who will teach us everything necessary for a life of true happiness and who will lead us into all truth.

I urge you, then, to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Do not give in to complacency or to apathy, do not allow yourselves to settle into a spiritual rut. Strive always to grow closer to Jesus Christ, to become ever more perfect reflections of love. Heed well the words of the Apostle which we heard today: “Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3). If you live in this way you will imitate the love of Jesus Christ and you will experience the gift of his peace; you will be renewed by his grace and rejoice in his love.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, September 27, 2011.