

**Homily for the 150th Anniversary of the Founding of Saint Isidore Parish
May 25, 2014**

**Saint Isidore Parish
Bethany, Illinois**

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

Reverend fathers and deacons, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:
This past May 7th was my 50th anniversary of receiving the sacrament of confirmation. Most people probably don't remember the date of their confirmation. I know mine because I looked up my records when I was named bishop in 2003.

The bishop who confirmed me, Bishop Aloysius Wycislo, was still living at the time. He was auxiliary bishop of Chicago when he confirmed me and later was named bishop of Green Bay. When I was appointed auxiliary bishop of Chicago in 2003, I called Bishop Wycislo in Green Bay, who was then 97 years old. I told him that he probably wouldn't remember, but he confirmed me when I was in sixth grade in 1964. I thought he would like to know that one of the students he confirmed had become a bishop! He was planning to come to my consecration as a bishop, but unfortunately he fell and broke his hip a couple of weeks prior to the

ordination. So later that year, I drove up to Green Bay with a copy of my confirmation certificate and took him out for lunch to celebrate. It was a wonderful visit and also very timely, since he died just a few months after that.

The Sacrament of Confirmation is very much on my mind during this time of the year as I travel throughout our diocese to administer it to our young people. It is also a sacrament that the Church is inviting us to focus on now as we near the celebration of the Feast of Pentecost, the day on which the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles to strengthen them for carrying the Church forward following Christ's Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven. It is the fulfillment of the promise that we hear from Him in today's Gospel where He tells His disciples: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18).

In our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we have the story of a primitive form of the Rite of Confirmation whereby the Apostles Peter and John are called to Samaria to impart the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. (Acts 8:14-17) This is very much the same way that Confirmation is administered today. As a successor to the Apostles, I am

called to come to various parishes to share the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands and by anointing the candidates with Sacred Chrism.

By receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation, we are brought into a deeper relationship with Christ by receiving a greater share in His life through the Holy Spirit which we receive. In a recent Wednesday General Audience, Pope Francis said the following about the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit constitutes the soul, the life blood of the Church and of every individual Christian: He is the Love of God who makes of our hearts his dwelling place and enters into communion with us.

The Holy Spirit abides with us always, he is always within us, in our hearts.¹

Continuing on, the Holy Father then speaks of how we are to see the Holy Spirit as a gift, but not just any gift. He says:

The Spirit himself is 'the gift of God' *par excellence* (cf. Jn 4:10), he is a gift of God, and he in turn communicates various spiritual gifts to those who receive him. The Church identifies seven, a number which symbolically speaks of fullness, completeness.²

The Sacrament of Confirmation increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit within us to unite us more closely to Christ and His Church and to give us

a special strength “to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross.”³

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not meant to be placed on a shelf to admire as we might do with a statue or a picture. Rather, the Lord has given us these gifts that they might be used, not just for our own benefit, but also for the benefit of others. Last year on April 29, 2013, Pope Francis spoke to 100,000 people gathered in St. Peter’s Square for a “Day of Confirmands” Mass. The pope invited the faithful to see the transformation of the Holy Spirit in our lives as a calling from God to transform the world. By allowing ourselves to be guided by the Spirit, we “allow God’s constant help to make us new men and women, inspired by the love of God which the Holy Spirit bestows on us!”

The Holy Father exclaimed, “How beautiful it would be if each of you, every evening, could say: Today at school, at home, at work, guided by God, I showed a sign of love towards one of my friends, my parents, an older person! How beautiful!”⁴

The examples given by the pope remind us that transforming the world does not necessarily mean that we have to do remarkable things that

make the front page of the newspaper. The little things that we do in our daily lives, simple as they may seem, contribute in various ways to the greater picture of God's plan of salvation. Think, for example, of how over a long period of time, a constant drip of water can turn a jagged piece of rock into a smooth and rounded surface.

The privileged place for these gifts to be developed and shared is in the parish community. Our newly canonized saint, Pope St. John Paul II, spoke of the parish as "a community where God's gifts are received and where the baptized generously make their response of faith, hope, and love to the call of the Gospel."⁵ The parish is one of the most basic cells of Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church. These cells are places where the Holy Spirit lives and moves in the daily lives of the faithful.

Today, we are gathered together to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of St. Isidore Parish. Although the parish may not be a large one, and while few people have been to or even heard of Bethany, its presence as one of those cells in the body of the Church has not been without significance. From the sacraments that have been celebrated here to the other activities of the parish, the gifts of the Holy Spirit have indeed been received and shared with others in ways that have positively impacted this part of the

Church. For that, we give profound thanks to Almighty God, asking that He will continue to aid us in being good stewards of His gifts for the good of His Church here, throughout our diocese, and throughout the world.

As we continue our celebration, let us each be mindful of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we have received and then ask the Lord how He would like for us to be more generous in sharing those gifts with those around us, particularly here in this parish. By being open to the sharing of these gifts, we ensure that this parish will continue to be a strong cell in our particular Church in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois and in the universal Church throughout the world. By remaining faithful to this seemingly small piece of the larger picture in the Church, we do our part in preparing for the return of the Lord at the end of time, when we all hope to be welcomed by Him into the glory of Heaven for all eternity.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 9 April 2014.

² *Ibid.*

³ CCC 1303.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Homily at Day of Confirmands Mass*, 29 April 2013.

⁵ Pope St. John Paul II, "The Vocation of the Parish," January 25, 1997 talk to the third group of French bishops on the *ad limina* visit. *OssRomEng* 1477 (February 5, 1997) 5.