

**Homily for the Diocesan Mission Mass
October 1, 2014**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield**

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

Reverend Fathers, consecrated religious, principals, teachers and students, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here together at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception to celebrate our annual Diocesan Mission Mass.

In the magnificent artwork throughout this beautiful Cathedral, you can find many examples of people who have contributed to the missionary work of the Church in various ways throughout her nearly 2000 year history. I am going to point out some particular images now and I hope that you will have some time after Mass to look at them more closely.

High atop the pillar closest to me is one of the first great missionaries, the Apostle St. Peter. The word apostle means “one who is sent out,” and he faithfully heeded the call of Jesus to “go... and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). St. Peter brought the Good News to Rome, which was the center of the modern world at the time. It is because of his

missionary travels to Rome that, even to this day, we are called Roman Catholics. You can also see the depiction of Jesus giving the keys to the Kingdom to St. Peter in the first stained-glass window on the north wall of the Cathedral.

On the other pillar in the sanctuary is the other great missionary Apostle, St. Paul. After having experienced a life-changing encounter with the Lord, St. Paul was baptized and then spent the rest of his life dedicated to bringing the message of the Gospel to people far and wide, resulting in a great increase in the number of Christians.

Other examples of great missionaries include St. James the Greater, just behind me, who brought the faith to the people of Spain. On the north wall you will see a little shrine dedicated to St. Patrick, also known as the Apostle of Ireland for his work of bringing the faith to the people of that country. In the back, in the northeast corner next to the reconciliation room, is St. Anthony of Padua, a great preacher who did missionary work in Morocco and in his home country of Italy. In the opposite corner is a statue of St. Dominic, another great preacher who founded a religious order which continues to contribute today to the teaching and spreading of the faith throughout the world.

There is one more missionary commemorated here in our Cathedral that deserves special attention today. That missionary is St. Therese of the Child Jesus, often better recognized under her title as the Little Flower. She is depicted in the stained-glass window in the south wall above the entrance to the Atrium and the shrine with her statue is on the north wall. Today we give special attention to her because we celebrate her feast day. But she is significant to our celebration for more than that. She is also one of the two patron saints for the missions.

It is interesting that she holds such a significant title, because after entering the convent at the age of fifteen, she was never able to engage in what we would normally consider missionary work. She did not travel to any distant countries to bring the message of the Gospel to those who had not heard it. She was not able to join other missionaries in bringing the love and compassion of Christ to the suffering and the poor of the world. Yet, she had a great desire to be a missionary and therefore dedicated her life to praying and offering sacrifices for those who were engaging in those important works on behalf of the Church.

Her example is truly an inspiration for each and every one of us. She shows us that sharing in the missionary work of the Church is available to

everybody, regardless of the state in life in which we find ourselves. She was very aware that each member of the Church represents a different part of the one Body of Christ, all with a different function, all ordered toward a common goal. She saw her part as being within the heart of the Church, a part which, although hidden, is essential to the life of the Church.

The same is true for each one of us. On the day that we were baptized, we became members of this same body and God invites us to share in the work of the rest of the body. Maybe some of you are called to work as missionaries, bringing the faith to the four corners of the world. Some of you young men are likely being called to be priests who have a very special role to play in the mission of the Church by bringing the sacraments to the people of God. Some of you young women may be called to be like St. Therese and embrace the religious life. Others will be married and have children, called to perform the important missionary work of spreading the faith to the next generation.

The point I am trying to make is that none of us can see ourselves as unimportant to the work of the missions. The missionary work of the Church happens on every level, at every age, and in every location throughout the world, whether it be in our homes and schools here in

Illinois, or in the streets and villages of the poorest places on earth. Regardless of where the Lord calls us to be of service to His Church, we must always see ourselves as being on mission. To try to understand the Church without the element of mission is to misunderstand the true meaning of the Church as founded by Jesus Christ.

As children, your participation in the missionary work of the Church does not have to wait until you get older. You are a missionary now! As you move toward discovering what your vocation will be in life, you can imitate the example of St. Therese. She shows us what it means to be a missionary, summing it up as proclaiming God's love. In her autobiography, St. Theresa wrote, "I saw and realized that love sets off the bounds of all vocations, that love is everything, that this same love embraces every time and every place. In one word, love is everlasting." This message is desperately needed in our world where so many people doubt God's love and have a hard time believing that God really does love them. That is why I chose as my episcopal motto, "The Law of the Heart is Love."

We are encouraged to keep the work of missionaries always in our prayers. They are on the front lines of spreading the faith and are exposed

to many challenges. They benefit greatly from our support. We should also be close to our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are struggling to survive, either due to lack of food, water and shelter, or due to dangerous circumstances in which they live. In a particular way, we pray for those whose lives are threatened daily because of their faith in Jesus Christ. We need to show God's love to all of these people through our prayers, our words and our actions.

In just a moment, I will invite all of you to commit yourselves to being active members in the work of the missions through the Holy Childhood Association. By promising to offer your prayers, sacrifices, and love so that other children throughout the world will come to know the great love of God, you be following the command that we hear from our first reading today where we hear: "Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18). May this commitment motivate you to renew your desire to live the life of a missionary disciple not just in word and thought, but in actions which bring the love of God to people everywhere so that all of us can be united as one Body in the glory of Heaven forever.

May God give us this grace. Amen.