

**Homily for the Diocesan White Mass
Feast of St. Luke the Evangelist
October 18, 2014**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here for this celebration of our annual Diocesan White Mass as we give thanks to God for those who work as doctors, nurses, and medical professionals in service to the people of God who come to them for their various health needs.

Today, the Church celebrates the feast day of St. Luke, one of the four evangelists responsible for putting the message of the Gospel of Jesus into writing. St. Luke is also credited for writing the Acts of the Apostles which continues the narrative found in the Gospel that he wrote. These two books provide valuable insight into the life of Jesus and the early days of the Church. Put together, they also represent the largest amount of material written by any one author in the New Testament. Even though St. Paul is responsible for several more books in the Bible, the length of all of his writings do not equal that of the saint whom we celebrate today.

In addition to being an evangelist through his writing, he was also an evangelist through his preaching, as he brought the message of the Gospel to various locations. St. Luke testified at the beginning of his Gospel that he had never met the Lord (cf. Luke 1:1-4). Nevertheless, the passage that we hear from the Gospel about the seventy-two disciples being sent out would certainly have been applicable for him as he prepared to bring the Good News to the nations.

Jesus warns His disciples in that passage that He is sending them out “like lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3). He is preparing them for the fact that being His disciples will mean that they will encounter resistance and even persecution from those to whom they bring the Good News. Many of these initial disciples would even lose their life for their work of spreading the Gospel.

St. Luke would have certainly been aware of the hardships associated with being of service to the Gospel, yet he was not deterred from going out to the world with the message of salvation. Although the details of the struggles that he faced are not fully known, the Church does count him among the martyrs who shed their blood as a supreme act of witness for their faith, hence our red vestments for his feast day today.

In addition to his work of evangelization, St. Luke is known to have been a physician (cf. Col 4:4) and is thus the patron of health care professionals. It is for that reason that we celebrate this Diocesan White Mass today on his liturgical feast day, so-called as a “White Mass” with reference to the white uniforms normally worn by doctors, nurses and other medical professionals.

Returning to the words of the Gospel to which I just referred, I would like to suggest that the warning of Jesus to His disciples nearly two-thousand years ago also applies to you in the work that you do in the area of health care. In an address to the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations last year in Rome, Pope Francis spoke about some the challenges that you face. He said the following:

On the one hand, we note – and we thank God for it – the advances made in medicine, thanks to the work of scientists who passionately and unsparingly dedicate themselves to the search for new cures. On the other hand, however, we also find the danger of a doctor losing his own identity as a servant of life.¹

The Holy Father spoke about the “culture of waste” in which we live, a culture which threatens even to eliminate the lives of human beings,

especially those who are “physically or socially weaker,” such as the children in the womb, the sick, and elderly.

In light of this growing mentality, the pope encourages you to renew your awareness as being “servants of life.” You are in a privileged position to bring the loving care of Christ to the least among us, regardless of who they are or what they have done. You have the opportunity to be like the Good Samaritan who does not avoid those in need, but rather goes to them willingly, bring with you the many gifts that the Lord has bestowed upon you for your work.

These gifts are always to be used for the promotion and defense of life. It is truly unfortunate that some have used these gifts for the opposite purpose of bringing about the destruction of life. What makes this situation just as tragic is that these actions are often done in the name of health care, claiming that such uses of technology and science are loving solutions to those who suffer.

Such arguments appeal to the emotions of people and can be very convincing. Those who stand up for the dignity of all human life are often considered to be the ones who are unloving and unconcerned with the well-being of people. This is obviously offensive as it is a gross distortion

of the truth. It is clear, then, to see how you are very much like sheep among wolves as you try to remain obedient to the truth handed on to us by Christ and His Church in the midst of a ravenous culture of relativism and error.

In addition to your connection to St. Luke through your medical profession, you also have the opportunity to be evangelists who proclaim the goodness of life and the true goal of health care. In the same address mentioned earlier, Pope Francis offers the following reflection which is really at the heart of the message that you are encouraged to spread in your field of medicine. He said:

There is no human life more sacred than another, just as there is no human life qualitatively more significant than another. The credibility of a healthcare system is not measured solely by efficiency, but above all by the attention and love given to the person, whose life is always sacred and inviolable.²

As we continue our celebration during this month of October, which the Church observes as Respect Life Month, let us give thanks for the gift of all human life. We also thank God for the privilege of being called by Him to be servants, and not masters, of this precious gift of life. May we always

be faithful to that call, trusting in the Lord's protection and guidance as we work on His behalf to build a culture of life and love.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Francis, *Address to Participants in the Meeting Organized by the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations*, 20 September 2013.

² *Ibid.*