

**Mass and Commissioning of *Totus Tuus* Staff
Friday, June 6, 2014**

**Villa Maria Catholic Life Center
Springfield, IL**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good for us to be here this evening as you near the conclusion of your training in preparation for the *Totus Tuus* program to be held this summer in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. I am grateful for your willingness to give your time and energy to this important work of bringing the Good News of the Gospel to the many young people of the parishes to which you will go.

In our Gospel for today's Mass, we hear the familiar episode of the encounter of the Risen Jesus with Peter on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. In their conversation, Jesus asks Peter to profess his love for Him three times. After doing so, the Lord gives Peter the command: "feed my sheep" (John 21:17). This passage is seen by the Church as a confirmation by the Lord after His Resurrection to entrust the authority to govern the flock of Christ to Peter and his successors. This task of shepherding the flock is exercised in communion with the other Apostles and their successors, the

bishops, along with the priests and deacons, who are their helpers. Through the hierarchy of the Church, the people of God continue to experience the guidance and protection of the Good Shepherd until He returns in glory.

While it is true that this work of shepherding the flock falls primarily to those in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, it is important to remember that each of us is called to participate in the work of God's plan of salvation in our own unique ways. In the Gospel that we heard this past Sunday on the Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord, Jesus issued the following command: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). In his homily at the conclusion for World Youth Day this past summer in Rio de Janeiro, Pope Francis pointed to this passage and indicated to the young people that it is "a command that the Lord entrusts to the whole Church, and that includes you."¹

Just as the call to make disciples of all nations extends to all of the members of the Church, so too are the faithful called to participate in the work of feeding the sheep of the flock. As I mentioned, this task falls

primarily to the bishops and their collaborators, but the assistance of the remainder of the faithful is absolutely essential and extremely important.

As the one who has been given the primary responsibility of shepherding the flock of this diocese, I am pleased to welcome the assistance that you will provide in inviting the young people of our diocese into a deeper relationship with Christ, the Good Shepherd.

In his commentary on this dialog between Jesus and Peter, St. Thomas Aquinas writes that the triple command to feed the sheep indicates that “Peter ought to feed them three ways. First, they are to be fed by being taught...Secondly, they are to be fed by example...Thirdly, they are to be fed by being offered temporal help.”² All three of these ways of feeding the sheep will be accomplished by your work this summer.

First of all, you will feed the young people by teaching them. You will instruct them about the moral teaching of the Church found in the Ten Commandments. You will also teach them to meditate on the public life and ministry of Christ through their praying of the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary. They will also learn to better appreciate the liturgical life of the Church, particularly in the celebration of the Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As you teach, be mindful to be good stewards of the

Church's Tradition, teaching faithfully what the Church teaches to ensure that the young people are being fed with the good food of sound doctrine, and not the spoiled food of different opinions and theories which are often opposed to the truths of the faith.

Secondly, you will feed the youth by setting a good example. The example of your life will help to lend credence to the instructions that you share with them. As you provide instructions on the moral life, you must strive to practice what you teach so that your students might have a model to imitate. You will also have the opportunity to give them an example of how to pray, both devotionally and liturgically. In a particular way, you are encouraged to set an example of reverence during the celebration of the Holy Mass, showing to the young people by your attention that this is the most important part of our lives as Catholics.

Finally, we come to task of feeding the young participants by offering them temporal help. This form of feeding may not be quite as clear, as you are likely not going to be serving them in the same ways that you might serve somebody who does not have food, money, or shelter. I would like to suggest, however, that you are addressing their temporal needs by providing them with opportunities for fun and entertainment. Contrary to

some opinions, living our Catholic faith is not opposed to having fun. Enjoying activities and leisure can be good for us both mentally and physically so that we are more well-balanced in our lives and better able to accomplish the tasks that we have to do. In addition to the health benefits, the skits, games, and activities offer wonderful opportunities for imparting lessons and promoting various virtues.

Once again, I would like to thank all of you for your generosity in committing yourselves to be of service to the young people of our diocese and in assisting me in my responsibility of feeding the flock entrusted to my care. The work may be challenging at times and you may not initially see the fruits of your labors, but you can be assured that if you trust in God's grace, stay close to the Lord and remain faithful to the work that you are being asked to do, the Lord will do great things through you in the lives of many. May you continually seek the intercession of our Blessed Mother, under whose patronage this program has been entrusted, asking for her motherly care to assist you and all you serve in drawing closer to her Son.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Francis, *Holy Mass for the 28th World Youth Day*, 28 July 2013.

² St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on John*, 2624.