

**Homily for the Springfield Diocesan Council of Catholic Women
Our Lady of Good Counsel Women of Distinction Awards Mass
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

June 17, 2017

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

Reverend Fathers, Deacons, consecrated religious, members of the Springfield Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ; it is good for us to be here as we celebrate this Mass, during which several women chosen from parishes from across our diocese will receive the “Our Lady of Good Counsel Women of Distinction Award.”

It is most fitting that, as we gather to celebrate the lives of faithful discipleship led by these women whom we honor today, we do so under the patronage of our Blessed Mother. Our Blessed Mother serves as a model for all of us, showing us to how to live faith-filled lives as Christ’s disciples. As a matter of fact, a modern day saint, Edith Stein, who was canonized under her religious name as Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, wrote that: *“the imitation of Mary is not fundamentally different from the imitation of Christ. The imitation of Mary includes the imitation of Christ because*

Mary is the first Christian to follow Christ and she is the first and most perfect model of Christ.”¹

The Blessed Virgin Mary’s life certainly bears witness to the fact that she is the perfect model of Christian discipleship. Her place as the first disciple further points out how we must respond to the Lord if we are to be His disciples. We see this first instance of discipleship even before the birth of Jesus, at the moment of the Annunciation. In the Gospel according to Luke, Mary replied to the angel Gabriel, *“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”²* These very words, our Blessed Mother’s “yes,” or her *fiat* as it is called in Latin, is the first and one of the truest acts of discipleship that we see in the scriptures. Her wholehearted “yes” and her giving of her life over to our Lord is at the core of our understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Mary provides a perfect example for the followers of Jesus to fulfill His command when He said, “Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’”³ Like Mary, our “yes” should always be a “yes” to God, and our “no” should always be a “no” to sin.

My dear brothers and sisters, we too are called to echo these words in our daily lives. It is our obligation to turn our lives over to our Lord every

day and commit to serving Him as best we can, given our unique state in life. At times this can seem like a daunting task, but just as Mary had faith despite her fears, so too must we have faith despite of our limitations or fears. Whether that *fiat* in our lives is to serve Him in our parishes, in our communities, or in our families, our Lord calls us to love those whom we encounter in our everyday lives.

Another key point in her life that bears witness to Our Lady's role as the model of discipleship is that of her presence throughout Jesus' passion and death, during which her son, the Lord of Life was beaten, spat upon, and hung on the altar of the Cross as He offered Himself so that we might have eternal life. On a very human level, it isn't hard to believe that Mary would have experienced many of the feelings that any mother would experience if the child she loved was treated in such an inhumane way. However, where many parents would have been pleading for mercy on behalf of their child, our Blessed Mother, recognizing her part in salvation history and her role as a disciple of God, once again turned herself over to His will. Despite the heart-wrenching pain of what she witnessed, she gave control over to the Lord, once again surrendering her will so that He might bring to completion what He had come to do.

So, it is most fitting that our Lord, while he was on the cross, seeing John, the disciple whom he loved, with His mother, gave His mother to John, and through John to all of us so that she might be our mother and guide. Sacred scripture tells us that, from that time on, John took Mary into his home, and so too should we take Mary into our homes through a sincere devotion to our Blessed Mother. For if we foster a relationship with Mary and model our lives after the life of Our Lady, then we will grow in love and relationship with our Lord as His disciples. As Saint Paul wrote, “The love of Christ impels us”⁴ once we have come to the conviction that Christ died for us so that we too might be raised up to eternal life.

So, as we honor these women for their lives of faith and discipleship, may we entrust them and ourselves to Mary as our mother and guide. May she draw us ever closer to her Son, who comes into our hearts in this Eucharist, so that we will be given the grace to live as His true disciples and always give our full “yes” to God in our daily lives.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Essays on Woman: The Collected Works of Edith Stein, Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Volume Two, Second Edition* (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1996).

² Luke 1:38.

³ Matthew 5:37.

⁴ 2 Cor 5:14.