

**Homily on the Occasion of the  
150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Saint Michael Church**

**Saint Michael Church  
Sigel, Illinois**

**October 1, 2017**

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

Reverend Fathers, Deacon, consecrated religious, parishioners of Saint Michael Parish, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here to offer thanks to our Lord in celebration of the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Saint Michael Church here in Sigel. Since 1867, Catholics in this community have found a home in which they could unite in prayer and fellowship to journey together as disciples of Jesus Christ. The spiritual foundation laid so long ago continues to remain firm due to God's grace, which has made possible the many good works and sacrifices of so many who have preceded us. Therefore, we gather for this celebration of the Mass with a profound sense of gratitude for those gifts which we have received as we ask God's continued guidance, so that we might continue to be good stewards of those gifts.

On an anniversary such as this, it is natural to wonder what life was like 150 years ago. Looking at our circumstances here today in the year 2017, the differences in our country and world, as well as our way of life, seem vast. In 1867 Andrew Johnson was the 17<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, just two years after succeeding President Abraham Lincoln following his assassination; Nebraska was admitted at the 37<sup>th</sup> state in these United States; and William H. Seward, the Secretary of State, purchased Alaska for a sum of 7.2 million dollars. Also in 1867, the first elevated railroad began service in New York city, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was established, and here in Sigel, a church was established under the patronage of Saint Michael the Archangel.

While there is no detailed account regarding the decision to establish a Catholic community here in Sigel, what we do know points to the fact that the founders of this church committed themselves to following the Gospel of Christ and living as His disciples. In particular, they seem to have understood the message that we heard in our readings today, that of the importance of being obedient to the will of God.

Just a few moments ago, in our second reading, we heard from Saint Paul that the obedience of Jesus was not simply a submission to the will of the Father; rather, our Lord perfectly united Himself to the plans of the Father for our salvation. In doing so, our Lord gives us, His disciples, an example of what perfect obedience is: to make an active choice to follow the will of God in our lives. Like that of Jesus, our obedience to the will of God in our lives begins with freedom, the freedom to choose to follow the path that will lead to even greater freedom and ultimately our heavenly reward, or to follow the path that focuses on ourselves and the goods that the world gives, which will lead to restriction of our relationship with God and ultimately, if not corrected, to our loss of eternal life in Heaven.

In this regard, following the will of God for our lives gives us direction in roughly the same way that markings on the road give direction to travelers. When driving, we don't feel restricted by the markings on the highway; on the contrary, they give us the freedom to focus on other things. So too, our obedience to the will of God in our lives gives us the freedom not to spend all of our time focusing on what is next or what we should do; rather, it frees us up to focus on living authentic lives that are

committed to being Christ's disciples and good stewards of the many gifts that we have been given.

In our Gospel as well, we see Jesus speaking to the chief priests and the elders of the Jewish people about this very same topic. One of the keys to understanding the parable that our Lord lays out for them is to understand that those to whom our Lord is speaking are the people that said they would obey the will of God, but did not, and those who said that they would go their own way, but in the end, had a change of heart and took God's way.

It is, however, also important for us to understand that the parable is really not praising either son, for neither of them is the kind of son that would bring complete happiness and satisfaction to his father. While the first son, the one who said that he would not be obedient to the father but in reality did what his father asked, is certainly preferable to the second son, the perfect son would have been one who accepted his father's request with obedience and then also went and carried out what his father had requested. We all know people in our own lives who fall into either of the first two groups, or perhaps we ourselves also fall into one of these groups.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, if we fall either into the group of people who promise the Lord great things but in practice don't follow through on our commitments, or the group that sets out to fulfil our own will but then ends up submitting to the will of God, let us strive to follow the example of the saints more perfectly, especially Saint Michael the Archangel, whose feast day we celebrated this past Friday. As Saint Michael overcame Satan and his minions, may we strive in the spiritual battles that confront us to be obedient to the will of God in our lives and in our actions, so that we too might experience the freedom that comes from truly living as Christ's disciples in the midst of the world.

As we now continue our celebration of this Mass, we bring to the Lord our gratitude for all of the gifts that we have been given, especially the gift of this parish. We are grateful also for the vocations of the priests and religious sisters that have come from this parish and those who have served in this parish, and we pray for more young people to have the courage and strength to say yes to God's call to follow Him and serve His Church. May the Lord expand our hearts through the reception of the Eucharist, so that we might willingly and joyfully commit ourselves to the

discipleship and stewardship way of life, thus continuing to build on the firm foundation which has been established for us.

May God give us this grace. Amen.