

Homily for the Tenth Sunday of the Year – Cycle B
Admission to Candidacy for the Aspirants to the Permanent Diaconate
June 10, 2018

Chapel of the Chiara Center
Springfield, Illinois

† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, consecrated men and women, candidates for Holy Orders, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: we are gathered here for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the Capital City of the State of Illinois, where the word “candidate” is usually associated with politicians running for elective office. Today we celebrate the fact that these aspirants in our diaconate formation program want to declare their candidacy for the office of deacon in the service of the Catholic Church. Thanks be to God, there will be no endless series of televised debates, no constant stream of political ads on the radio, no phone calls from the candidates interrupting our dinner! We hope that these candidates will not attack each other or engage in negative campaigning! They still have a long way to go before their journey is over, but our prayers are that God’s grace will give them the courage, wisdom and strength they will need to persevere on the path to which they have been called.

Just like candidates for political office, these candidates for Holy Orders will have to satisfy an electorate to achieve their goal. Unlike candidates for political office, these candidates for Holy Orders will not be chosen by citizen-voters who cast ballots, but will be called by the Church through a successor of the apostles. They will not pursue a platform adopted by a political party or an agenda generated through polls, focus groups, Super PAC's or special interest groups, but will collaborate in fulfilling a sacred mission entrusted to the apostles by our Divine Savior.

Dear brothers, I am grateful for your generous and willing response in presenting yourselves as candidates for the diaconal ministry. Dear sisters, I am grateful for your generous and faithful support of your husbands, a support which is invaluable to them.

You, who are candidates for Holy Orders, have a special duty to understand the faith of the Church so clearly that it permeates your very lives. Your knowledge of the Scriptures, of the Creed, of the history of the Church and of the lives of the Saints should be such that you will have ready answers to the most common questions asked of the faith. What is more, your answers should strike to the heart of your questioners and lead them closer to Jesus Christ and to the joy of knowing Him.

As Saint Paul wrote in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, “Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, I believed, therefore I spoke.”¹ You also believe and therefore must speak out as well in your words and actions, “knowing that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and place us [together] in His presence.”²

In order to understand and embrace the Catholic faith more clearly and more deeply, you have begun your studies and formation, and several more years of them await you. You know that they will not always be easy; there will be times that are filled with joy and insight and times that are difficult and tedious. Even in the quest for the knowledge of God the Cross is present. I urge you to devote yourselves whole-heartedly to these studies, remembering the maxim of Saint Augustine: “I believe, in order to understand; and I understand, the better to believe.”³ If you devote yourselves in this and apply your mind to sacred learning, you will experience the joy of knowing the Lord and the joy of growing in knowledge and wisdom.

Last year we held our Fourth Diocesan Synod in which we focused on discipleship and stewardship. In addition to the clergy and consecrated religious who participated, delegates from each of our 129 parishes in this

Diocese voted overwhelmingly to adopt a dozen declarations intended to set the direction and tone for the pastoral ministry of this local Church for at least the next ten years.

The first of these declarations proclaims a new mission statement for all of us as members of this Diocese: “The mission of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is to build a fervent community of intentional and dedicated missionary disciples of the Risen Lord and steadfast stewards of God’s creation who seek to become saints. Accordingly, the community of Catholic faithful in this diocese is committed to the discipleship and stewardship way of life as commanded by Christ Our Savior and as revealed by Sacred Scripture and Tradition.”

To further this mission, the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is committed to implementing the Four Pillars of Discipleship and Stewardship, namely, **hospitality, prayer, formation** and **service**. In other words, we will **invite** people proactively to join us in prayer, especially Sunday Mass; we will **provide** well-prepared celebrations of the sacraments and other occasions for **prayer** as signs of hope and paths of grace to heaven; we will **study** the Bible and **learn** more about Jesus and

our Catholic faith; and we will **serve** each other, especially those in need, by practicing charity and justice.

With great confidence and expectation, the Church entrusts this mission to you, dear candidates for Holy Orders, as collaborators together with the priests of the diocese in the apostolic work of your bishop. The diaconal ministry is, principally, one of charity, one of love borne from an intimate knowledge or, and friendship with, Jesus Christ. It is my fervent hope that your theological and pastoral studies will not only deepen your relationship with the Savior, but that your studies will also help you to rejoice in the Lord always.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this past Friday we celebrated the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and yesterday the Church commemorated the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In today's love-deprived world, we must commit ourselves all the more to serving our Lord faithfully by following the example of Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother and their immeasurable love for us, for we serve Christ only as faithfully as we serve Him lovingly, through giving ourselves in loving service to our neighbors. If we do the will of God, Jesus will look upon us as His brother and sister and mother, indeed, as His own family.⁴

Know that “the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). If you allow the Lord to search your heart and to reveal to you whatever it is that keeps you from following Him completely, He will mold your heart after His own and through you His love will be known.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:13.

² 2 Corinthians 4:14.

³ Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Sermo* 34.7.9.

⁴ Mark 3:35.