

**Homily on the Occasion of the  
150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Saint Mary's Church**

**Saint Mary's Parish  
Marshall, Illinois**

**August 11, 2018**

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

Father Koomson, parishioners of Saint Mary 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 Saint Mary Church here in Marshall. Since 1868, Catholics in this community have gathered here in prayer and fellowship as 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 of those who have preceded us. We come, therefore, to this celebration of the Eucharist with a profound sense of gratitude for the gifts we have received as we ask God's continued guidance, so that we might continue to be committed disciples of our Lord and good stewards of His abundant gifts.

On an anniversary such as this, it is natural to wonder what life was like one hundred and fifty years ago. Looking at our circumstances today in the year 2018, the differences in our country and world, as well as our way of life, seem vast. In 1868, the cable-operated West Side and Yonkers Patent Railway in Manhattan became the first elevated railway in the United States; the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified; Thomas Edison applied for his first patent, the electric vote recorder; the world's first traffic signal lights were installed in the London borough of Westminster; President Andrew Johnson became the first of two presidents to be impeached by the full House of Representatives (although he was later acquitted by the Senate); Ulysses S. Grant was elected the eighteenth president of these United States; and here in Marshall, Illinois, under the watchful eye of Rev. Henry I. Hoven, work began on the construction of Saint Mary's Catholic Church in which we stand today.

As we look back on the humble beginnings of this church and the lives of the people who have been part of its history over the past one hundred and fifty years, we have a unique opportunity to reflect on what it means to be missionary disciples of our Lord.

Quite appropriately, our readings today focus on what it means to be nourished and sustained on our journey of faith. In the first reading from today's Mass, we read that Elijah the prophet, fleeing from Jezebel, the consort of King Ahab, went to Mount Horeb, the holy mountain. However, during the long and difficult journey, Elijah became so exhausted that he wished to die. But we heard how,

An angel touched him and ordered him to get up and eat. Elijah looked and there at his head was a hearth cake and a jug of water... After he ate and drank, then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb (1 Kings 19: 4-8).

We see in this passage that, while Elijah could not stand to go any further on his own strength, he could go forth nourished and strengthened by the meal the Lord gave to him when he was ready to give up.

Looking deeper into the text, made clearer through the lens of faith, we find that it is applicable to our lives today. For us, the holy mountain to which the prophet was traveling is an image of heaven. The forty days that Elijah spent traveling to Mount Horeb represents our journey through life, during which we too encounter temptations, difficulties and fatigue. At times, we may even find ourselves, like Elijah, distraught and without hope.

But, just as the angel in the story invites Elijah to eat and find strength in the food provided by the Lord, so too does the Church invite us to nourish ourselves on the Bread of Life that is Christ Himself, present in the Most Holy Eucharist.

In our Gospel today, we hear a continuation of the Gospel reading from last week. In this well-known section of the Gospel according to John, our Lord forcefully reminds us that, in order to participate in the divine life, we must receive Him in Holy Communion, for in this sacrament of the Body and Blood of our Lord, we receive the source of all grace, Jesus Christ, really and spiritually present.

There is no greater gift that we can receive than the gift that our Lord gives us, the gift of Himself in Holy Communion. For this sacrament nourishes and strengthens us to live as Christ's disciples in the midst of the world today.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the Holy Eucharist is for the spiritual life what food is for our physical lives. Just as food strengthens us and prevents weakness and death, so too does the Holy Eucharist strengthen us for our lives of faith. Through frequent or daily communion, the spiritual

life becomes fuller and the soul is enriched with the many virtues that are needed to bear witness to Christ in our daily lives.

As we now continue our celebration of this Mass, may 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 we pray for more young people to say yes to God's call to follow Him and serve His Church. May the Lord expand all of our hearts through the reception of the Eucharist so that we might willingly and joyfully commit ourselves to living as Christ's disciples each day of our lives, thus continuing to build on the firm foundation which has been established for us.

May God give us this grace. Amen.