

Homily Outline for the 27th Sunday of the Year – Cycle A
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
October 4, 2020

† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

- I. It was three years ago that we held our Fourth Diocesan Synod on the theme of discipleship and stewardship.
 - A. The first declaration of our Fourth Diocesan Synod proclaimed 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.”
 - B. 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.
- II. Today’s Gospel has much to tell us about discipleship and stewardship (Mt 21:33-43).
 - A. As is often the case, we hear our Lord preaching by using a parable. In this parable, we hear about a landowner who has built a magnificent vineyard for his workers. When the time comes for the harvest, the landowner sends multiple servants to collect the proceeds from the harvest, but the workers in the vineyard mistreat and kill each servant that the landowner sends. Seeing that no progress has been made through sending his servants, the landowner sends his son, to which the workers say to one another, “This is the heir, come let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.”

- B. At first glance, the parable contains so many elements that we might miss a substantial number of them. So, it is best to break it down into themes or topics. In staying with the order of the parable, let's first look at the three primary things that the parable is telling us about God.
1. First, the parable tells us about God's trust in us. We hear that the landowner entrusted the vineyard to the workers. He did not stand over them to exercise a parental sort of supervision; rather he went away and left them to their task of producing wine. In the very same way, God entrusts us with His work here on earth. As a matter of fact, every task we receive is a task given to us by God to lead us and those around us closer to Him.
 2. Secondly, it tells of God's patience. The master sent servant after servant to deliver his message to the tenants. He did not come with anger and seek revenge against the tenants when one messenger had been abused and mistreated. Quite the contrary, he gave the workers chance after chance to respond to his request. So, too, does our Lord bear with us patiently despite all of our sinfulness. As stewards of our Lord's vineyard, we are called to see that bearing fruit means repentance, true conversion, and, most importantly, actions that manifest that conversion.
 3. Finally, it tells us about God's judgment. We see that at the end of the parable, the landowner took the vineyard from the workers and gave it to other people. In this we must recognize that God's harshest judgment is when He takes out of our hands the task which He has given us to do when we fail to live as His disciples and stewards of the many gifts that He has given to each of us.
- C. With regard to what Jesus is telling us about ourselves in the parable, first and foremost, we hear our Lord explain to us the very nature of the privilege that we are given as sons and daughters of God.
1. The vineyard was equipped with everything that the workers could have needed. The hedge, the wine press, the tower: all of these were given to the workers in order to make their task easy and enable them to discharge it well.
 2. Through this, we must recognize that when our Lord gives us a mission or a task to do, He does not just simply ask us to carry it out without giving us the skills or tools with which to do it; rather, He also gives us everything we need to fulfill His will for our lives, that is, to live first and foremost as true disciples of Jesus.

- D. The final piece of the parable that we should examine is what Jesus is telling His listeners about Himself. It is clear from the portion of the parable in which the workers beat and kill the son of the landowner who was sent to carry his father's message, that Jesus was keenly aware of what fate He would experience at the hands of those to whom He was sent. Moreover, our Lord is telling us that he would not simply die because He was compelled to die; rather, He willingly embraced His suffering and death on the cross out of love for each and every one of us.
- III. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is only fitting that after reflecting on each of these aspects of our Gospel today, we must ask ourselves what we should do better each day in response to our Lord's love and care for us so that we might not be like the workers in the parable today who squander the gifts that the Lord gave to them. Instead, let us strive to unite ourselves more perfectly to Him through living the stewardship and discipleship way of life in the midst of the world and so contribute to the building up the kingdom of God on earth so that one day we might be worthy of receiving our inheritance of eternal life in Heaven.
- A. In this regard, I would like to let you know that we are taking a new model this year for the RCIA, the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, whereby people prepare to be received into the Catholic Church.
- B. We are taking an approach informed by the book, *The Parish is the Curriculum*.
1. The basic idea is that along with regular catechetical meetings, our Catechumens and Candidates will be asked to partake in one parish activity per week in addition to Sunday Mass, such as a prayer group, service opportunity, or really anything advertised in the Weekly Bulletin.
 2. We hope that this will integrate our Seekers into the parish community over the whole year.
 3. I am telling you about this because all of our parishioners will have a role in the RCIA.
 4. In effect, we see the entire parish as part of the "RCIA team." As baptized Christians, we are all called to welcome others into our parish family.
 5. While not everybody is a formal catechist, we are all called to bear fruit by actively welcoming and teaching through example those who are interested in the Church.

6. After the initial inquiry period, we will be including photos of our Candidates and Catechumens in the Weekly Bulletin, with the hope that our parishioners will recognize their faces when they start attending Sunday Mass and other events, and in this way, help to welcome and bring them into our family of faith.
 7. To help bring them into our family of faith, we ask you to do what St. Paul wrote to the Philippians as we heard in today's second reading (Phil 4:6-9), namely, be witnesses to "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious," whatever is excellent and "worthy of praise."
- IV. As we now prepare to receive the bread of life and the cup of our salvation, may this Eucharist strengthen us to be missionary disciples to bring others to Christ and faithful stewards of God's creation who bear good fruit.
- V. May God give us this grace. Amen.