

**Homily on the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of Saint Elizabeth Parish
Saint Elizabeth Church
Granite City, Illinois**

November 14, 2020

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Father Alfred, parishioners of Saint Elizabeth 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 Elizabeth Parish here in Granite City. With this celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we begin your parish's yearlong sesquicentennial celebrations. Starting with about twenty families in 1870, Catholics in this community have grown to over 900 families and have gathered 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 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 2020, the differences in our country and world, as well as our way of life, seem vast. In 1870, John D. Rockefeller incorporated the Standard Oil Company; the Chicago Base Ball Club, later to be known as the Chicago White Stockings and ultimately the Chicago Cubs, played their first game against the St. Louis Unions of the National Association of Base Ball Players, an amateur league; Christmas was declared a federal holiday in the United States; Rome became the capital of a unified Italy; and the First Vatican Council issued a dogmatic constitution with the approval of Pope Pius IX, declaring the infallibility of the Pope in matters of faith and morals. It is in this historic context that the seeds were planted for St. Elizabeth Parish.

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 disciples sent out by Our Lord as trustworthy stewards of God's creation.

In the first reading from today's Mass, the Book of Proverbs gives us a snapshot of the ideal woman and man. Saint Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians reminds us that we are children of the light. There is no reason to fear the dark.

In our Gospel today from Saint Matthew, Jesus tells the story of three servants to whom a rich man entrusted his fortune. Imposing loans on people was common in ancient times as a profitable way to deposit cash. Two of his employees were delighted to have such trust placed in them. After all, a talent was a coin of value, and he had lent them five and ten talents apiece. Eager to please him, they showed enterprise in their use of his money, unlike the third servant, who wanted to save himself any trouble or anxiety. He simply dug a hole and buried it.

Jesus was not a financial advisor. He was interested in a different kind of treasure. God is rich in kindness and we are distributors of that grace. What God bestows is not meant to be hoarded. God gives us wisdom and skills that we may be of service; God forgives us that we might treat other people generously. Such is the "commerce" of God's kingdom: God invests in us with no certainty of return, other than to increase the circulation of love in this world.

Jesus had harsh things to say of the servant who buried his one talent. All of us have some ability, however modest, and to hide it away or use it only for ourselves is more than laziness. What we have is not gifted, but loaned to us: we are trusted stewards of a grace intended for everyone.

It may feel risky to enter the “marketplace” of other people’s lives. Offering friendship can make us vulnerable. It was fear, perhaps, that kept the lazy servant from trading his one talent. Fear that we might get nothing in return can sometimes make people hesitant to give. The servant assumed his master to be a hard-nosed businessman who expected too much of people, and it may be that we have grown up with the same idea about God. Jesus shows us what our heavenly Father is really like: God’s happiness is in sharing. And so is ours.

Easy achievements are not the most satisfying. Effort, time and loving attention give value to human endeavors and dignify people. Good stewardship of God’s creation is to share it with gratitude for what belongs to God.

As we approach Thanksgiving Day in less than two weeks, these closing days of the church year are a good time to make an audit of just how indebted we really are. Maybe we, too, have some gift buried within us which might yet be consecrated to God's service.

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. In our reception of Holy Communion, may our thirst for union with God be quenched.

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.