**Homily for the 30th Sunday of the Year – Cycle B**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

**October 24, 2021**

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**Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Today throughout the world, the Catholic Church celebrates World Mission Sunday. It is our yearly opportunity to honor our life as Catholics through the special call we received at Baptism to be missionaries. It also reminds us of the service offered by the Church’s missionaries in bearing Christ’s message of salvation to all people in all lands.

In 1926, Pope Pius XI instituted Mission Sunday for the whole Church with the first worldwide Mission Sunday collection taking place in October 1927. The Mission Sunday collection is taken up annually on the next to last Sunday during the month of October.

The theme the Holy Father has chosen this year is taken from the *Acts of the Apostles*: ‘We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard’ (Acts 4:20). In his message for World Mission Sunday, Pope Francis says:

Once we experience the power of God’s love, we cannot help but proclaim and share what we have seen and heard. Jesus’ relationship with his disciples and his humanity shows us the extent to which God loves our humanity and makes his own our joys and sufferings, our hopes and our concerns.

Our prayer, reflection and material help are a lifeline to missionaries in all continents who are striving to preach and live the Good News that God loves us. World Mission Sunday is vital to the growth of the Church and the spread of the Gospel in predominately impoverished and remote areas overseas. Donations for World Mission Sunday support churches, hospitals, schools and vocations in countries where the Church is new, young, or poor.

The Gospel for this Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time is wonderfully appropriate in revealing the life-changing joy that can come to us as followers of our Lord and Redeemer. We meet Jesus as He is traveling with His disciples and a crowd of people who want to stay in His company as long as possible. They pass a blind man sitting by the side of the road begging. His name is Bartimaeus. Obviously, he has already heard of Jesus’ message and miracles; so he shouts out, acknowledging Jesus as the Son of David and asking for His pity. The people try to quiet him; after all, he is loud and annoying and trying to get Jesus’ attention. But Jesus hears Bartimaeus and tells the others to send him forward. “He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him… ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ The blind man replied to Him, ‘Master, I want to see.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go on your way; your faith has saved you.’ Immediately he received his sight and followed Him on the way” (Mark 10:50-52).

Ironically, even though he is physically blind, Bartimaeus sees clearly through the eyes of faith. Jesus recognizes this and thus instructs the blind man to go his way because his faith has saved him. Immediately he receives his physical sight and follows Jesus on the way, which is Mark’s way of saying that Bartimaeus became a disciple of Jesus.

As we celebrate the Eucharist on this World Mission Sunday, may our eyes be open to see Christ present in Holy Communion and in our neighbor, especially the least among us who are most in need.

Today’s liturgy also marks the beginning of the diocesan phase of what Pope Francis is calling the “Synod on Synodality.” The theme of this upcoming Synod of Bishops is: “**For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission**.” These three dimensions are profoundly interrelated.

**Communion** finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. It is Christ who reconciles us to the Father and unites us with each other in the Holy Spirit.

**Participation** calls for the involvement of all the members of the People of God – laity, consecrated and ordained – to engage in the exercise of deep and respectful listening to one another. In a synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will.

**Mission** recognizes that the Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centered on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This synodal process has a deeply missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the Church to fulfil her mission of evangelization more fruitfully in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God’s kingdom.

The Preparatory Document for the Synod on Synodality says that the fundamental question that guides this consultation of the People of God is the following: “A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, ‘journeys together.’ How is this ‘journeying together’ happening today in your particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our ‘journeying together’?”

In answering this question, I am pleased to say that our diocese has already embraced this synodal path of “journeying together” in a variety of ways, most significantly in recent years through our Fourth Diocesan Synod, which took place throughout most of the 2017 calendar year on the theme of discipleship and stewardship. Our Diocesan Synod included consultations with all the laity, priests, deacons, and leaders of the various religious communities in our diocese, as well as delegates from each of the 129 parishes in our diocese. This culminated in the adoption of [12 Synodal Declarations and 172 Statutes](https://www.dio.org/uploads/files/2017_Synod/FourthSynodCompiledActsDeclarationsandStatuteswebversion.pdf). I followed up in 2018 with the publication of my [Post-Synodal Pastoral Letter](https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:f2774a24-e2e4-4dbe-a2a7-be2a5ef2f61d), *Ars vivendi et moriendi in Dei gratia* (On the Art of Living and Dying in God’s Grace).

Prior to our Fourth Diocesan Synod, at my request Benedictine University of Lisle, Illinois, conducted a survey of inactive Catholics from November 2012 through March 2013, and then a second survey on active Catholics was gathered through February to March 2014. The survey results were published in September 2014 under the title, “[Joy and Grievance in an American Diocese: Results from Online Surveys of Active and Inactive Catholics in Central Illinois](https://www.dio.org/uploads/files/Communications/Press_Releases/2014/Joy-and-Grievance-PUBLIC-FINAL-sep-11-2014.pdf).” In my [reflections on the results of these surveys](https://www.dio.org/communications/press-releases/reflections-from-bishop-thomas-john-paprocki-on-joy-and-grievance-in-an-american-diocese.html), I said that “I thought it was essential to hear not only from those who have stopped attending Mass, but also to hear from those who do attend regularly to find out what draws them and keeps them coming to church. If we are doing something right for some people, that should help us learn what we need to do to bring back those who have drifted away.

At the conclusion of our Fourth Diocesan Synod in 2017, I said that I did not plan to call another diocesan synod during my tenure, since a diocesan synod sets the pastoral direction for the indefinite future, but would leave that to my successors to determine when it would be opportune to convoke another diocesan synod. I think much of the information that we are being asked to gather during the diocesan phase of the Synod on Synodality can be gleaned from what we learned from our surveys of active and inactive Catholics and what we heard during our listening sessions and consultations held during our Fourth Diocesan Synod. Additional consultations will be done with our canonical consultative bodies, the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Presbyteral Council, and parish pastoral councils, supplemented perhaps by focused listening sessions in the deaneries as needed. The key question will be: “What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our ‘journeying together’ and to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ?”

The diocesan phase is to last from October 2021 to April 2022. A second, continental phase will take place from September 2022 to March 2023. The third, universal phase will then take place with the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in October 2023.

Pope Francis concluded his homily on October 10th with these words: “The Synod is a process of spiritual discernment, of ecclesial discernment, that unfolds in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the word of God. . . . Let us not miss out on the grace-filled opportunities born of encounter, listening and discernment. In the joyful conviction that, even as we seek the Lord, he always comes with his love to meet us first.”

May God give us this grace. Amen.