

**Homily for Opening of the Springfield Dominicans 150 Year Jubilee
as a Religious Congregation**

Sacred Heart Convent, Springfield, IL | August 19th, 2022 AD

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, Consecrated Religious, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here to begin this jubilee year, during which your community will celebrate 150 years of the Dominican Sisters of Springfield as a religious congregation. We gather in the context of the celebration of the Eucharist which, as you know, means thanksgiving, for it is fitting to thank God for the many ways in which His graces have blessed your community and the many souls to whom you have been called to serve for a century and a half.

As you begin this year-long time of remembrance and renewal, I would like to propose three points on which to reflect. I draw these three points from our Holy Father, Pope Francis, who offered them to the consecrated religious throughout the world when he began the Year of Consecrated Life which took place in 2015. In his Apostolic Letter to begin the year, he invites us “to look to the past with gratitude,” “to live the present with passion,” and “to embrace the future with hope.”¹

I also reflected on these three points when the consecrated religious of the diocese gathered for a Vespers service at our Cathedral in September 2015 during that year. At this Mass, we can reflect on these points as they apply to this community specifically, and I would invite you to continue to keep these points close to your heart in prayer as you reflect communally and individually in the upcoming year.

We begin by looking to the past with gratitude. As your bishop, and on behalf of my predecessors, I offer my profound gratitude to you for the countless blessings that have come to our diocese through the generous service and prayers of the Dominican Sisters of Springfield in so many places throughout Central Illinois. It is my privilege to be with you this evening to convey that gratitude in person.

It would be impossible to try to enumerate the many places where the Dominican Sisters of Springfield have served over the years, but suffice it to say that thousands upon thousands of souls have been touched by your faithful witness to the Gospel, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ by word and deed. In a diocese with significant tracts of farmland, the image of sowing seeds is one that is fitting, for through your service, you have sowed seeds in the soil of many souls, especially young people, seeds

which, with God's grace, have grown and borne fruit in ways that you will not fully appreciate this side of Heaven. For that reason alone, you can look to the past with great gratitude and joy, knowing that the Lord has used you as His instruments in helping to build up the Body of Christ in this section of His vineyard.

For each of you individually, this year can be a time during which you look back to the many ways you have been asked to serve the community, perhaps in ways you had never expected. Each of you has memories that you cherish. You also likely have memories of times when religious life and service were not so easy. Whether joyful or painful, we give thanks to God for them all, for we believe what St. Paul said in his Letter to the Romans: "We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Beginning with gratitude for what the Lord has done in our lives and in your community can lay a good foundation for moving into our next point of reflection – living the present with passion. In the Holy Father's Letter on this point, he invites religious communities to consider the mission embraced by their founders and foundresses, and to ask: "Are our ministries, our works and our presence consonant with what the Spirit

asked of our founders and foundresses?"² To be sure, times change and there is need to adapt to various circumstances, but the heart of the mission remains the same. At the heart of the mission is the living out of the Gospel, which is summarized well in the response Jesus gave to the scholar of the Law in the Gospel we just heard:

You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Living these commandments begins, of course, within these walls, where you have the privileged opportunity to grow in the virtue of charity toward God and one another, which will only strengthen your commitment to participating in the mission of this community. Once again, Pope Francis provides a helpful insight into this:

Our founders and foundresses were attracted by the unity of the Apostles with Christ and by the fellowship which marked the first community in Jerusalem. In establishing their own communities, each of them sought to replicate those models of evangelical living, to

be of one heart and one soul, and to rejoice in the Lord's presence (cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 15).³

In light of this, how fitting are the words we heard from the *Acts of the Apostles* earlier, words which capture an important aspect of your community life: "The community of believers was of one heart and mind" (Acts 4:32). Such was certainly the desire of your foundresses, and would that this could be said of you as well 150 years later!

Embracing the mission which motivated your foundresses for your apostolic service and your community life, and re-committing yourself to it in the present opens the door for the same Spirit who worked in them to work through you. In that regard, Pope Francis references Pope St. John Paul II by offering the following:

The same generosity and self-sacrifice which guided your founders must now inspire you, their spiritual children, to keep alive the charisms which, by the power of the same Spirit who awakened them, are constantly being enriched and adapted, while losing none of their unique character. It is up to you to place those charisms at the service of the Church and to work for the coming of Christ's Kingdom in its fullness.⁴

This will be an important task during this year, and to the extent that you are able to reaffirm your commitment to this mission, the greater will be your passion in continuing in service.

On this point, the Holy Father shares a sort of particular *examen* for each of you to consider regarding your relationship with Him, which should be the primary driving force in your living your vocation in this present time with passion. He invites you to consider the following:

We have to ask ourselves: Is Jesus really our first and only love, as we promised he would be when we professed our vows? Only if He is, will we be empowered to love, in truth and mercy, every person who crosses our path. For we will have learned from Jesus the meaning and practice of love. We will be able to love because we have his own heart.⁵

Looking back with gratitude to your call when the love of Christ was so powerful and real can be a beautiful and fruitful practice. For that same love with which Jesus called you to this life is being showered upon you these many years later. For each of you individually, may this be a year of falling in love again with the one who captivated your heart at the

beginning of your journey. May that love restore the youth of your soul as you give yourself with a renewed generosity to Him.

Finally, we embrace the future with hope. This is certainly the most challenging task, for we do not exactly know what the future has in store for us. It can be tempting to see your age and the number of new vocations as a source of discouragement. But this need not be the case, for hope does not allow us to be sad. As St. Paul reminds us: "hope does not disappoint" (Romans 5:5). To be sure, the hope of which St. Paul speaks has more to do with the hope we have for eternal life, but we can also trust that it applies to the future that lies in store for the Church as well.

As He was about to ascend to Heaven, Jesus sent His Apostles out with the clear instructions: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). This mission was being undertaken by the Church for more than 1800 years by the time your congregation began, and your beginnings were in reality just a continuation of what had gone before. You have built upon a foundation laid by many before you. The Church in future generations will continue the work of spreading the Gospel, and you

can take comfort in knowing you had a role to play in that. Whatever the future may hold for your community, and we pray that it will indeed continue for many more years, be at peace knowing the final words Jesus told to His Apostles before ascending, words which we do well to be reminded of: “behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Communities may come and go, dioceses and parishes may cease to exist. But the Lord will always be with His Church, guiding her until the end of the age.

As we continue our celebration of the Eucharist, we offer ourselves to Him in gratitude for all that He has done for us, communally and individually, all He is currently doing, and all that He will do in the future. May our reception of His Body and Blood at this Mass enkindle in our hearts a passion for serving Him and His Church as we look forward in confident hope to our final reward which awaits us at the end of our journey, where we will finally rest from our labors in service to the Gospel.

In keeping with this theme of *hope* at this Mass, I think it is fitting that I close with the hymn, “Lord of All Hopefulness,” a traditional Irish melody with lyrics by Jan Struther, and which I offer now as a prayer expressing our heartfelt hopes for all of you:

*Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever child-like, no cares can destroy,
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.*

*Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labors, and give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.*

*Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.*

*Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.*

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter To All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, §1, §2, §3

² Pope Francis, *To All Consecrated People*, §2.

³ Pope Francis, *To All Consecrated People*, §2.

⁴ Apostolic Letter to the Religious of Latin America on the occasion of the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of the New World *Los caminos del Evangelio* (29 June 1990), 26.

⁵ Pope Francis, *To All Consecrated People*, §2.