

**Homily for the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Martyr Saint George  
Mass of Reception into the Novitiate, First and Final Profession of Vows**

**Saint Mary Church, Alton, Illinois | August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022 AD**

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

Reverend Fathers, Deacons, Consecrated Religious, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good to be here with all of you once again for this beautiful Mass where today two of your sisters will be received into the novitiate, two will make their first profession of vows, and four will profess final vows. I have spoken before on the gifts that God pours upon you sisters on this occasion: your rule, the evangelical councils, your habit, even Our Blessed Mother's name, as well as all the less tangible outpourings of grace that fill all of our hearts on this occasion. The gestures, objects, and symbols of this liturgy will remind us of these treasured gifts once again. So too will our prayers: we began with those inspirational lines of the Church's request, "Creator Spirit all divine, come visit every soul of thine; and fill with thy celestial flame, the hearts which Thou thyself didst frame." From that precious hymn, through all the other prayers and canticles of this Mass, our hearts are carried aloft by the words we hear, speak, receive, and offer. They move us, change us, convict us, and sanctify us.

But, if our focus remains only on the beautiful sounds, sights, and scenes of this liturgy, we risk missing the gift that God most wants to give us today: the gift of Himself. Strangely and surprisingly, it is in the moments of *silence* – the pause before each prayer, the breath as each hymn concludes, the moment that Jesus enters our hearts in Holy Communion – more than any of those other moments – where we can best notice Our Lord’s quiet voice and sublime embrace. These simplest and most serene moments of encounter with God are perhaps the ones we find hardest to describe or quantify, but for that very reason they are the deepest and most enduring ones. We will not always have a glorious choir to carry our souls on high. We will not always have a splendid Church in which to pray. We will not always have our families and sisters packed around us to give such joy to our hearts. We will not always be able to bear the day’s heat in Christ’s vineyard. ... But at any moment, and at any point in our lives, we can *always* step back into the silence of God, and find there that He is with us always.

Our world has banished silence from our lives. Stopping, stilling, quieting ourselves is too risky, too uncertain, too impractical ... but the truth remains that *only* in silence can we find God. It *is* risky to walk into the wilderness with only God to sustain us. We can no longer depend on those

who have secured us in their love. We have to abandon our own self-expectations that carry us through the day. We find that our strengths are small and insufficient, and our failures and weaknesses are all too evident. Every one of us, at some point during our walk with the Lord, will find that He has invited us into the desert, into His silence. Our first instinctual response may be fear, uncertainty, anguish, or anger, but if we choose love over all those reactions, giving them, and giving ourselves, into the hands of God, we discover the beautiful truth that *He is enough*. In silence we have only God ... but in silence we discover that God ... only God ... and our relationship with God, is all we truly need. This is the point explained so beautifully by His Eminence, Robert Cardinal Sarah in his book, *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise*. Only in *quiet* can we come to *know* the Father as the Son knows Him, and love the Father as the Son loves Him ... and find that nothing else matters. As Hosea wrote, "I will betroth you to me forever ... with compassion ... with fidelity, and *you shall know the LORD*" (Hosea 2:21-22).

My dear sisters, when the Heavenly Father gives you slivers of His own divine silence, know they are a beautiful invitation into the depths of His heart. And know that your response of love, to simply allow your heart to rest there in His, is a beautiful gift to Him of your heart.

Paul, the great, the energetic, and the staunchest of Apostles, reveals to the Philippians that he has discovered this same truth: "I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Nothing really matters except for *knowing God, and being known by Him*. But Paul's emphasis is not merely that our intimacy and communion with God grow when all else is stripped away. His reassurance to the Philippians, like His reassurance to the Romans, is that *nothing* can separate us from the love of God. Sufferings cannot steal our interior union with Christ, but carried with Him, they can actually deepen that communion. Weaknesses do not impede the Lord's work, but once silently surrendered to God, become places where His power echoes through our hearts. Our own virtues, righteousness, even faith seem too little, yet they are enough to carry us into silent prayer, and there we find ourselves carried by the Lord of Heaven and Earth. The fact is that *nothing* can steal from us the gift of interior quiet given to us in relationship with God. Not only is His silence a gift of Love, the presence of His Love incarnate in our hearts, but it is a shelter in the storm, a firm foundation, an indestructible place of closeness with Him. My dear sisters, *no one ... no cross ... no failure* can steal from you that deepest place in your heart where God

dwells with you. Protect that gift of His silence within, return often to it, treasure it, for it is Him.

I am currently reading the journal of a Benedictine priest who chronicles the Lord's work in his own heart. He was shown, to his sadness, his own waning devotion to God. Christ was rekindling within him a desire for his own sanctification and that of all priests. The monk records in this book, *In Sinu Jesu*, one Thursday evening where the Lord clarified this call: "To all [priests] will be offered the grace of a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to purify the priesthood of the impurities that have disfigured it, and to restore to the priesthood a brightness of holiness such as the Church has never had since the times of the Apostles." One might think that Jesus would then propose some great pilgrimage, conference, event, or sign, but instead He explains, "This sacerdotal Pentecost is being prepared already in silence and in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament" (*In Sinu Jesu*, p. 9). This divine masterplan should not surprise us, for when Jesus was explaining how His disciples would bear fruit, He emphasizes only one essential task: "Remain in me." The fruit we will bear does not depend on our efforts, energy, or skills, but on our abiding in Him. "I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit" (John 15:5).

My dear sisters, you will constantly be tempted to do more and pray less, to fill your prayer rather than sit in silence, to think that Adoration is not enough ... but Jesus' promise is that nothing bears greater fruit than time simply spent with Him.

Sister Maria Christi Delaney, Sister M. Xavier Schulze, Sister M. Annuntiata Gangl, Sister M. Pieta Keller [final profession], Sister M. Veronica Kennedy, Sister Bethany Marie Burnham [temporary profession], Sister Mary Kolbe, and Sister M. Gloria [reception into novitiate], you have all been given great gifts throughout your life that have led up to this moment and many of them are close to your hearts this day. Today my simple reminder to you is that the greatest of all these gifts is God giving Himself to you, and that every moment of His silence is a treasured occasion when He renews that gift.

Never underestimate how much of a gift this is! Creation was brought into being with a thought of love. The Incarnation happened with a whispered "yes." Our redemption was accomplished when Christ bowed His head and laid down His life. The consecration occurs with the silent outpouring of God's Spirit upon the bread and wine. God's greatest works in your hearts will also happen in silence. The simple question that He speaks into our hearts today: Will you let my quiet Love dwell in your heart?

*Be still, my soul; the Lord is on your side;  
bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;  
leave to your God to order and provide;  
in ev'ry change he faithful will remain.  
Be still, my soul; your best, your heav'nly friend  
through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*

*Be still, my soul; your God will undertake  
to guide the future as he has the past;  
your hope, your confidence, let nothing shake;  
all now mysterious shall be bright at last.  
Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know  
his voice who ruled them while he lived below.*

*Be still, my soul; when dearest friends depart  
and all is darkened in the vale of tears,  
then you will better know his love, his heart,  
who comes to soothe your sorrows and your fears.  
Be still, my soul; your Jesus can repay  
from his own fullness all he takes away.*

*Be still, my soul; the hour is hast'ning on  
when we shall be forever with the Lord,  
when disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,  
sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.  
Be still my soul; when change and tears are past,  
all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.<sup>1</sup>*

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> German Title: *Stille, mein Wille; dein Jesus hilft siegen*; Author: Kathrina von Schlegel; Translator: Jane Borthwick (1855); Melody: *Finlandia*; Copyright: Public Domain.

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## Be Still, My Soul

1. Be still, my soul: the Lord is on your side;  
 2. Be still, my soul: your God will un - der - take  
 3. Be still, my soul: when dear - est friends de - part,  
 4. Be still, my soul: the hour is has - t'ning on

bear pa - tient - ly the cross of grief or pain;  
 to guide the fu - ture as he has the past,  
 and all is dark - ened in the vale of tears,  
 when we shall be for - ev - er with the Lord,

leave to your God to or - der and pro - vide;  
 Your hope, your con - fi - dence let noth - ing shake;  
 then shall you bet - ter know his love, his heart,  
 when dis - ap - point - ment, grief, and fear are gone,



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in ev - 'ry change he faith - ful will re - main.  
 all now mys - te - rious shall be bright at last.  
 who comes to soothe your sor - row and your fears.  
 sor - row for - got, love's pur - est joys re - stored.

Be still my soul; your best, your heav'n - ly Friend  
 Be still my soul; the waves and winds still know  
 Be still, my soul; your Je - sus can re - pay  
 Be still, my soul; when change and tears are past,

through thorn - y ways leads to a joy - ful end.  
 his voice who ruled them while he dwelt be - low.  
 from his own full - ness all he takes a - way.  
 all safe and bless - ed we shall meet at last.

Katharina von Schlegel, 1752  
 Tr. Jane Borthwick, 1855; alt. 1990; mod.

FINLANDIA 10.10.10.10.10.  
 Jean Sibelius, 1899; arr.  
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