

**Homily for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
the Celebration of the Centennial of the Translation of the Diocese from Alton to  
Springfield, and the Opening of the Diocesan Year of the Eucharist , at  
Saints Peter and Paul Church (The Old Cathedral), Alton, Illinois  
December 8, 2022**

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

My dear Priests, Deacons, and brothers and sisters in Christ:

As your Bishop, it is good to be with you this evening at Saints Peter and Paul Church, the “Old Cathedral,” here in Alton, to begin our Diocesan Year of the Eucharist and to open our Centennial Celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the transfer of our diocese from Alton to Springfield. We do so on this Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, the patronal feast of our Diocese, of our Cathedral, and of our country, the United States of America.

A few years ago, after my installation as Bishop of our Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, I was going through some papers in the files of my predecessors in a file cabinet at our Cathedral Rectory in Springfield and I came across this letter dated November 3, 1923, addressed to Reverend Monsignor James A. Griffin, Pastor of St. Mary’s Church in Joliet, Illinois, when Joliet was still part of the Archdiocese of Chicago. The letter was signed by Archbishop Pietro Fumasoni Biondi, Apostolic Delegate, which

meant he was the Pope's representative to the United States of America. In his letter, Archbishop Biondi wrote:

Right Reverend and Dear Monsignor,

It affords me great pleasure to inform you that His Holiness, Pope Pius XI, has graciously appointed you Bishop of Alton, Illinois. I offer you my cordial congratulations on the appointment, and I beg you to accept the assurance of my best wishes for your happiness and success in the Episcopacy.

Right behind this letter in the file was a second letter from Archbishop Biondi dated just 19 days later, on November 22, 1923, addressed to Rev. James A. Griffin, Bishop-elect of Alton, in which the Apostolic Delegate wrote:

Reverend and Dear Father,

I have the honor to inform you that His Holiness, Pope Pius XI, decided to transfer the present See of Alton to Springfield, the Capital of the State of Illinois, where you will take up your permanent residence.

According to this provision the diocese of Alton will assume the name of "Diocese of Springfield - Illinois", while the present diocese of Springfield will be known as "Diocese of Springfield - Massachusetts".

In order to facilitate the Decree of the transfer, will you kindly let me know as soon as possible what Church in Springfield will be designated as the Cathedral. You will receive the Decree in due time.

Asking for an early reply, I am,

With kindest regards and in union of prayers,

Sincerely yours in Xt.,

/s/ † P. Fumasoni Biondi, Apostolic Delegate

Bishop-elect Griffin initially designated St. Mary's Church in Springfield as the "new" Cathedral, but many people thought that church, which was built in 1859, was antiquated and unfit to serve as the mother church of the diocese. So Bishop Griffin took up the task of building a new Cathedral to coincide with the diocese's Diamond Jubilee in 1928. That lofty goal was accomplished with the dedication of our new Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on October 14, 1928.

This Church of Saints Peter and Paul here in Alton continues to have a special place in the life of our diocese, still providing for the pastoral care of the faithful in this area, thanks to the dedicated ministry of your Pastor, Father Jeff Holtman, and the staff of the parish. I am also mindful that two of my predecessors are interred here in the crypt under the church, the first

two bishops of this diocese, Bishop Henry Damien Juncker and Bishop Peter Joseph Baltes. The third and last bishop of the Diocese of Alton, Bishop James Ryan, is buried nearby in St. Patrick Cemetery. May they rest in peace. As it is our hope that they now share in the eternal glory of God's Kingdom, along with Bishop Griffin, Bishop William O'Connor, Bishop Joseph McNicholas, and Venerable Father Augustine Tolton, may they intercede for us and for our eternal salvation.

As the Catholic Bishops of the United States have embarked on a Eucharistic Revival for our nation, I thought it would be appropriate to observe a year of the Eucharist to coincide with the Centennial Celebration of the transfer of our Diocese from Alton to Springfield.

In anticipation of this Centennial Year and Year of the Eucharist, I requested and received a decree from the Holy See granting a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions of sacramental Confession, Holy Communion, and prayers for the intention of the Pope, for the Christian faithful who are truly penitent and motivated by love to visit our Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Springfield or the Church of Ss. Peter and Paul in Alton between the 8<sup>th</sup> day of December 2022 and the 9<sup>th</sup> day of December 2023. Such a visit to a sacred place is known as a pilgrimage,

which involves attending a liturgical service celebrating the jubilee or at least spending a suitable period of time devoted to prayers for the faithfulness of the Diocese to the Christian vocation, concluding with reciting the Lord's Prayer, professing the Symbol of Faith, that is, the Creed, as well as offering invocations to the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary and Saints Peter and Paul.

The elderly, the sick, and all those who cannot leave their home for a grave reason are equally able to attain a plenary indulgence, having the disposition of detachment from any kind of sin and the intention of fulfilling, as soon as possible, the three usual conditions, by joining themselves spiritually to the jubilee celebrations and offering prayers to the merciful God for the sufferings or hardships of their own lives. One way for them to do this would be by watching and praying along with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass being livestreamed from our Cathedral and many of our churches.

This plenary indulgence may be offered for one's own spiritual benefit or may be applied through prayer for the souls of the faithful held in Purgatory.

The Church's teaching on indulgences is not well-known or well-understood by many people, including Catholics, so some explanation might be helpful.

First, the Decree comes from the Apostolic Penitentiary in Rome. Here the word "Penitentiary" should not be confused with the secular understanding of a penitentiary as a prison, although even that use of the term is rooted in the sense of a place of penance or repentance. The Apostolic Penitentiary is a dicastery or department of the Holy See at the Vatican that has the responsibility to act on behalf of the Pope for matters dealing with what is called the internal forum, such as the Sacrament of Penance, and indulgences as expressions of divine mercy.

Most people have heard of indulgences, but some people mistakenly think that indulgences were abolished some years ago. That is not true. Indulgences are still very much a part of "the heavenly treasures of the Church," as the Decree from the Apostolic Penitentiary states. Martin Luther protested against the sinful practice of selling indulgences, which is known as simony. The selling of indulgences is forbidden by the Church for the same reason that it is a sin against simony to sell anything that is blessed, such as a blessed rosary or crucifix. It is certainly advantageous to use

religious articles for our spiritual benefit that have been blessed after they were purchased. Having abolished the practice of selling indulgences, we should certainly make use of indulgences for our spiritual benefit as well.

According to the *Manual of Indulgences* published by the Apostolic Penitentiary in 1999, “An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment for sins, whose guilt is forgiven, which a properly disposed member of the Christian faithful obtains under certain and clearly defined conditions through the intervention of the Church, which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies authoritatively the expiatory works of Christ and the saints. An indulgence is partial or plenary according to whether it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin” (nn. 1-2).

At this point some people may wonder: if I have confessed my sins and they were forgiven when they were absolved by the priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, how is it that there is still temporal punishment for my sins? Saint Augustine provides a helpful answer to that question: “Man is obliged to suffer (in this life) even when his sins are forgiven, although it was the first sin that caused him to fall into this misery. For the penalty is of longer duration than the guilt, lest the guilt should be accounted

small, were the penalty also to end with it. It is for this reason—either to make manifest the indebtedness of his misery, or to correct his frailty in this life, or to exercise him in necessary patience—that man is held in this life to the penalty, even when he is no longer held to the guilt unto eternal damnation” (Tract on the Gospel of John, 124, 5).

The difference between forgiveness of the guilt and paying the penalty can be seen clearly in the sin of stealing. When a person goes to sacramental Confession and is absolved of the sin of stealing, there is still an obligation in justice to make restitution, that is, to pay back or restore what was stolen. If the rightful owner also discharges the debt, in a sense that is an indulgence, since the rightful owner is being indulgent in pardoning the debt as well as the guilt.

Similarly, a person who confesses to having used pornography is forgiven, but the desire to continue to look at pornography does not automatically go away and must be purged through mortification and penance. Thus, we have the pious practice of “offering up” our pains and sufferings in this life as penance for our sins. If that purgation is not accomplished before we die, it must be completed in Purgatory or be remitted through various partial indulgences or a plenary indulgence. A



plenary indulgence can be acquired only once a day, except for those who are on the point of death. If we are able to receive a plenary indulgence on a frequent or even daily basis during our Year of the Eucharist, as is the case for those who attend Mass here regularly at Ss. Peter and Paul Church or at our Cathedral in Springfield, it would be laudable and charitable to apply some of those indulgences beyond what we need for ourselves for the poor souls still suffering in Purgatory.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). When our sins are forgiven and we are finally purged of all desires other than the desire to see God face-to-face, we will be ready to enter into His Heavenly Kingdom!

The exemplar of the Christian disciple who was most pure of heart is, of course, our Immaculate Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Today’s Holy Day turns our attention to that fact that from the moment of her conception, Mary was kept free of the stain of sin and prepared to say yes to the request from God brought to her by the angel Gabriel. Mary’s *fiat* – her *yes* – reverses the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve.

In the Book of Genesis (Gen 3:9-15, 20), we read how God created a good world for the benefit of Adam and his wife. Both the man and his wife,

fashioned in God's image and likeness, had the benefit of God's protective word steering them away from the fruit of the tree of knowledge with its hurtful consequences.

The first clue that something has gone very wrong is the fact that God must call out for the man. Beforehand, apparently the man and his wife would readily approach whenever God was present. But now they fear to do so because they are ashamed to stand naked before their Creator. Clearly there is now some injury in their relationship with God. It also becomes clear there is injury between the man and his wife. Adam, who was initially overjoyed at the gift of his wife, now coldly describes her as "the woman." He even seems to place blame on God for putting the woman in his life to begin with. The woman blames neither Adam nor God; she candidly declares that she was tricked by the serpent's clever argument. Eating from the tree of knowledge has also brought injury to the relationship between man and animals. There is enmity between the woman's offspring and that of the serpent. Fittingly, the serpent must crawl about on the dust of the earth to which man must now return as a result of the serpent's deception.

Despite all this, the reading concludes with a focus on goodness and blessing rather than on death. Adam calls his wife *Eve*, a name which plays

on the Hebrew word for life. She becomes the mother of all those born into this world.

In contrast to first disobedience described in the Book of Genesis, we have the Gospel account of the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38), which tells of Mary's free and humble obedience to God's call. Because she sets aright mankind's relationship with God, the early Church fathers Justin Martyr and Irenaeus rightly called her the New Eve. More with heartfelt trust than understanding, Mary offers her *fiat*: "Let it be done to me according to your word."

On this Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, we pray that we may learn from the example of Mary her obedience to God, that, like her, and through her intercession, we may always say "yes" to God and to His invitation share eternal life at the heavenly banquet in His Divine Kingdom.

During this Year of the Eucharist, let us take time to reflect on the mystery of the Eucharist. "The reality that, in the Eucharist, bread and wine become the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ without ceasing to appear as bread and wine to our five senses, is one of the central mysteries of the Catholic faith. This faith is a doorway through which we, like the saints and mystics before us, may enter into a deeper perception of the mercy

and love manifested in and through Christ's sacramental presence in our midst. While one thing is seen with our bodily eyes, another reality is perceived through the eyes of faith. The real, true, and substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist is the most profound reality of the sacrament" (USCCB, *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*, n. 21).

As we receive Christ at this Mass in Holy Communion, may we remember that the "Lord is generous to us with his grace; and so we, by his grace, should always humbly ask him to give us what we need. ... Let us adore Jesus who ever remains with us, on all the altars of the world, and lead others to share in our joy!" (USCCB, *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church*, nn. 58-59).

May God give us this grace. Amen.



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

1811 Billmore Street

Washington, D.C. 3rd. Nov. 1923

Nº 8376-f

THIS NO. SHOULD BE PREFIXED TO THE ANSWER

Rev. James A. Griffin D.D.  
Pastor of St. Mary's Church  
Joliet, Ill.

Rt. Rev. and Dear Monsignor,

it affords me great pleasure to inform you that His Holiness, Pope Pius XI, has graciously appointed you Bishop of Alton, Illinois. I offer you my cordial congratulations on the appointment, and I beg you to accept the assurance of my best wishes for your happiness and success in the Episcopacy.

I will be obliged to you if, upon the receipt of this letter, you will kindly send a telegram to the Delegation, so that I may know the letter has reached you, and that you accept the appointment.

The information herein contained is still secret and it should remain so until it has been published by the Holy See in Rome. To insure secrecy, therefore, I suggest that, in telegraphing to me, you use the following conventional form: "Your letter has been received and meets with my approval.

Again expressing my congratulations and best wishes, I am

sincerely yours in Xt.,

+ *P. Tomasoni - Priondi*  
Apostolic Delegate.





UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

1811 Billmore Street

Washington, D.C. Nov. 22, 1923.

No 8496-f

THIS NO. SHOULD BE PREFIXED TO THE ANSWER

Rev. James A. Griffin, D.D.,  
Bishop-elect of Alton,  
217 N. Ottawa St.,  
Joliet, Ill.,

Reverend and dear Father:

I have the honor to inform you that His Holiness, Pope Pius XI, has decided to transfer the present See of Alton to Springfield, the Capital of the State of Illinois, where you will take up your permanent residence.

According to this provision the diocese of Alton will assume the name of "Diocese of Springfield - Illinois", while the present diocese of Springfield will hereafter be known as the "Diocese of Springfield - Massachusetts".

In order to facilitate the publication of the Decree of the transfer, will you kindly let me know as soon as possible what Church in Springfield may be designated as the Cathedral. You will receive the Decree in due time.

Asking for an early reply, I am,

With kindest regards and in union of prayers,

Sincerely yours in Xt.,

+ P. Fumasoni-Biondi *Alp. of Diocesa*

Apostolic Delegate.