

Homily for the Diocesan Respect Life Mass
Holy Family Parish, Granite City, Illinois
Saturday of the 26th Week in Ordinary Time (Year 2) | October 1st, 2022 AD

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My dear brother priests, deacons, consecrated religious, married couples, and all gathered here: It is good to be with all of you today for our annual Diocesan Respect Life Mass. Together we pray in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass today that our land may be a place where the sanctity of all life would be upheld from conception to natural death. After Mass, while some stay here in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, we will continue our prayer while walking around the abortion clinic and praying the Rosary. Jesus' words to His seventy-two disciples are given to us today: "I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. Behold, I have given you the power 'to tread upon serpents' and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you" (Luke 10:18-19). It seems that Our Lord here extrapolates on the promise to St. Peter recorded in Matthew 16:18, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it." As long as we are united, within the Church, to Christ, we have nothing to fear from the attacks of the enemy! Even the most venomous and

destructive of the Evil One's assaults, Jesus says, will not prevail against those who remain in union with Him.

Few things could be imagined as more destructive of Christian culture, of the work of the Church, and the salvific plan of Christ, than the killing of millions of unborn babies. Nonetheless, Jesus tells us that "the gates of hell will not prevail," and that, in the end, "nothing will harm you." How can He say this? Does He not know what is happening several blocks from this Church, and across our land? Can He not see the wounds of sin that have led so many mothers and fathers to abandon their own children? Where is the victory of Calvary to be found in the calamity of abortion?

We seek our answer from Christ Himself. We turn to Him today and ask, "How long O Lord?" "Will you intervene?" "What must we do?" His first answer, through the providence of our readings today, comes from the story of Job. During this week, each day we have walked with Job through the loss of his property, family, and the respect he held before his friends, and even his own health. He cries out to God, begging Him to answer, and - at the climax of this dramatic story so familiar to any of us who have suffered - God answers Job from the storm cloud: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:4). God goes down the long list of creatures throughout the

world – the stars, the angels, the sea, the animals – and asks Job whether he knows how the least of them was made. Job, of course, is silent and humbled before the majesty of God. He repents of his doubt and surrenders himself once again into God’s Almighty hands. Then, marvelously and miraculously, all that he had lost is restored to him: sheep, camels, oxen, donkeys, sons and daughters ... and not only that, but his faith and confidence in God as well. Yet one part of this story should give us pause: Job’s original livestock, and home, and family, were *not* returned. The sons and daughters he had at the beginning of the story are still lost, and dead. His book ends with restoration, but *limited restoration*. God has shown His power, and held back the Evil One who had assaulted Job, but the Enemy has not yet been overthrown, nor have the powers of death been reversed.

We should be able to recognize ourselves in a similar place. With the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the *Dobbs* decision of just three months ago, we rejoice to see the attack of our enemy turned back. God has made His power evident over our land and we see the miracle that is His grace at work in fragile, broken, fearful human hearts. Part of our prayer today is in praise of God’s work that has returned to our country a greater freedom for life. Yet our hearts still mourn the loss of so many innocent lives, and here in Illinois, we find that

the Evil One's assault on life – against children, against mothers and fathers, against the family that is meant to be an icon to all of God's love – that in our State, Satan's attack is all the more frantic and brutal.

Jesus steps into this gap, this “problem of evil,” this continued attack from the “gates of hell.” He tells the Seventy-Two, and us, that they must place their joy, their hope, their confidence, not in victory over the Evil One – though that will in God's time be given to them – “but rejoice because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). *Jesus knows His Father*, and so He reminds us that the Father will never forget any of those that He has created. Every child is cherished in His Love, and He has entrusted the salvation of each of them to His Son. Jesus knows in His bones the tremendous truth given to Isaiah: “Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands” (Isaiah 49:16). Our joy today does not depend on whether our country has chosen Christ, or not ... We ground our joy, not on whether Satan currently seems defeated, or not ... And we do not praise God only when we understand His plan, can feel His victory, or know how this all works out ... *No*, our joy and exultation in God, depends not what we see around us, *but on what we know to be true in Eternity*: “Your names are written in Heaven.”

Notice how Jesus continues: “At that very moment [Jesus] rejoiced [in] the Holy Spirit and said, ‘I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him’” (Luke 10:21-22). Jesus leads us to His Father in Heaven; *that* is why we rejoice today. We trust that Christ’s victory will come in time, that no assault of the Evil One can win in the end, and that with Christ, in Christ, the Love that the Heavenly Father has for us is unassailable, ineradicable, and unshakeable.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux stands with us today in this truth. Her “little way” is nothing less than this: no matter what faces us, no matter what tries us, no matter what wearies us, to keep our eyes on the Love that the Father has for us. It sounds easy, except, like every follower of Jesus, we too live in the middle of the death-throes of Satan. Our Lord bore the brunt of the Evil One’s attack on Calvary, and wins victory for each and every one of us when, giving Himself in love to the very end, He prays “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” (Luke 23:46). This is the fight of every saint: to remain in the certain

truth that we are held by the Father through thick and thin. Thérèse had to fight to hold to this truth to the end. She suffered for months from tuberculosis, from doubts and darkness in her soul, from horrible temptations to sin, to disbelieve, to abandon God ... She had to fight with everything she had to hold onto the truth that God held her in His hand. We must endure a similar battle!

In the face of evil, our fight is only sometimes directly against his attack. Above and beyond any sort of return fire, our fight must be to *abide in Christ*, to trust in the Father's Love and power, and to *live out of that love and power*. In Christ, we remain in the Father's hand and are capable of withstanding the most withering attack of the Devil, and, like Jesus, we can respond to even the most brutal hatred with a love that can only be given to us from Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.