

**Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 19, 2023**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Rejoice! This is the first word for the Entrance Antiphon for today's Mass, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, known as Laetare Sunday, from the first word in Latin of chapter 66, verse 10 of the Prophet Isaiah, *Laetare, Ierusalem, ... omnes qui diligitis eam; gaudete!* which means, "Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful!" These words and the rose-colored vestments we wear set a tone of joyful anticipation of our upcoming celebration of Easter.

Today's Gospel passage (John 9:1-41) that we just heard is the detailed account of Jesus healing a man who had been blind from birth. It is one of seven signs found in the first half (chapters 1-12) of the Gospel of John. A sign here is a miracle that Jesus works that points beyond itself. It shows how Jesus reveals some aspect of God's divinity. This sign reveals that Jesus is the light of the world. He demonstrates this by healing a man who was blind from birth. This gift of sight undoubtedly brought joy to the man born blind,

but also causes the healed man a great deal of difficulty in dealing with those around him. The question is: Who is really blind in this story – and who can really see?

As the argument between the Pharisees and the healed man continues, it becomes clear that the Pharisees are the ones who are blind, whereas the blind man sees clearly. The healed man has moved beyond recognizing Jesus as the man who healed him; he describes Jesus as a prophet and finally as the Son of God. Spiritually, this healed man demonstrates a profound clarity of vision. Jesus reveals himself to the healed man as the Son of God, which the healed man fully believes. The Pharisees, however, increase in spiritual blindness as they continue to reject who Jesus is and what he has come to do. What we learn from this is that when we live in the truth of what God does in our lives, like the man born blind, we become Christ's witnesses.

Another reason for me to rejoice is that today marks twenty years since my ordination as a bishop. It was on March 19, 2003, that His Eminence, Francis Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago, ordained me along with Bishops Francis Kane and Gustavo Garcia-Siller to serve as Auxiliary Bishops of Chicago.

Prior to my episcopal consecration, it was a great privilege for me to have served as Chancellor for Cardinal George. When my second term as Chancellor expired, Cardinal George appointed me to serve as Pastor of Saint Constance Parish, a large parish near O'Hare Airport. Then, for seven years, I served as Auxiliary Bishop overseeing a region in the Archdiocese of Chicago on the northwest side of the city and the western suburbs known as Vicariate IV. After my appointment as Bishop of Springfield in Illinois in 2010, I continued to work with Cardinal George in his capacity as Metropolitan of the Province of Chicago, which, along with the Archdiocese of Chicago, includes our Diocese of Springfield and the other four dioceses in Illinois – Rockford, Joliet, Peoria, and Belleville.

I learned an abundance of important lessons that have shaped my life and ministry as a bishop by observing and working closely with this brilliant and holy churchman over the span of almost two decades. Now, thanks to the outstanding biography of Cardinal George by Michael Heinlein, *Glorifying Christ: The Life of Cardinal Francis E. George, O.M.I.*, newly published by Our Sunday Visitor, many more people who never had the opportunity to meet Cardinal George will get to know this saintly and towering figure

who dedicated his life to giving glory to Christ in the Church and in the world.

Cardinal Francis Eugene George, O.M.I., was an exemplary pastor and heroic disciple of Christ. After graduating from Saint Paschal Grade School on the northwest side of Chicago, he was told that he could not be a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Chicago because of a physical disability resulting from polio that would have posed a hardship for him to climb the stairs at the high school seminary in downtown Chicago, to and from which he would have needed to commute every day by public transportation. So instead he enrolled at St. Henry's Preparatory Seminary in Bellville, Illinois, a boarding school where he would not have to deal with stairs.

He joined the Congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and studied theology at the University of Ottawa in Canada. He was ordained a priest by Auxiliary Bishop Raymond P. Hillinger in his home parish at St. Pascal Church on December 21, 1963.

Cardinal George pursued undergraduate studies in philosophy at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C., and then doctoral studies in philosophy at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana. In these years, he also taught philosophy at the Seminary of the Oblates in

Mississippi (1964-69), at Tulane University (1968), and at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska (1969-73).

From 1973 to 1974 he was Provincial Superior of the Midwestern Province of the Oblates at Saint Paul, Minnesota. He was then elected Vicar General of the Oblates and worked in Rome from 1974 to 1986, during which time he also visited the many Oblate missionary communities around the world.

He returned to the United States and became coordinator of the Circle of Fellows of the Cambridge Center for the Study of Faith and Culture in Cambridge, Massachusetts (1987-90). During that time, he pursued doctoral studies in theology at the Pontifical Urban University in Rome, with a specialization in ecclesiology (1988).

Pope John Paul II named him Bishop of Yakima in Washington State in 1990. After five and a half years at Yakima, he was named by Pope John Paul II as Archbishop of Portland, Oregon, in 1996. Less than a year later, on April 8, 1997, Pope John Paul II named him the eighth Archbishop of Chicago, following the death of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin on November 14, 1996. The installation took place on May 7, 1997, at Holy Name Cathedral.

As Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Chicago, I was present both at the funeral of Cardinal Bernardin in 1996 and at the Installation Mass for then-Archbishop Francis George in 1997. I accompanied him to Rome when he received the pallium—a band of wool that symbolizes the role of a Metropolitan Archbishop as shepherd of the flock—and again in 1998 when he received his red hat from Pope John Paul II, making him a member of the College of Cardinals. He served as President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops from November 2007 to November 2010. After working with him for almost twenty years, it was a privilege for me to concelebrate his Mass of Christian Burial at Holy Name Cathedral on April 23, 2015.

As Michael Heinlein describes so eloquently in his book, Cardinal George was a prophetic voice in the Church — a man able to see things as they are and from the point of view of the whole Church. His episcopal motto, “To Christ be glory in the Church,” encapsulates his legacy, because every decision he made, every action he took, every suffering he endured, was about serving others and pointing them to our Savior.

Most of all, Cardinal George was a Christian in every sense. He was concerned about relationships and people, not careerism or advancement. He was attentive to the poor and those on the margins. He was a man of

prayer, dedicated to Our Lady, and devoted to the Eucharist. He articulated the Faith and was committed to reform. He was honest, accountable, genuine, and holy. Admired for his pursuit and proclamation of the truth and his personal witness to the Gospel, Cardinal George remains a model for discipleship and leadership.

I would not be the bishop I am today without the excellent example, mentoring, and continued intercession of this saintly man. May he rest in peace, and may he continue to guide and inspire us to glorify Christ in His Church.

May God give us this grace. Amen.