

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

Saint Mary Church, Alton, Illinois | August 2nd, 2023 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 for this wonderful liturgy today as Lucia Westrick will be received into the novitiate as Sister Miriam, and three sisters will make their first profession of vows: Sister Mary Giorgiana Butler, Sister Mary Paul Callahan, and Sister Stana Maria Burnham. We welcome your friends and family to share in the joy of this momentous occasion along with the members of the religious community of the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Martyr Saint George.

We began this liturgy singing, “Creator Spirit all divine, come visit every soul of thine; and fill with thy celestial flame, the hearts which Thou thyself didst frame.” Indeed, we call upon the divine Creator Spirit to fill our souls – and especially the souls of these sisters – with the wisdom and grace of the Holy Spirit and enflame our hearts that we may love as Our Lord as loved us (John 15:9-17) so that we may no longer take pride in ourselves, but boast in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:22-31).

I just flew in to St. Louis this morning from Orlando, Florida, where I was attending the Annual Supreme Convention of the Knights of Columbus. Last week I was on the other coast of the United States attending the annual summer conference of the Napa Institute in Napa, California. Both of these occasions were uplifting experiences as over 800 of Christ's faithful gathered in California and over 2,500 Catholic men with their wives and family members gathered in Florida. It is likewise inspiring to return today to our diocese for this liturgy in which four young women will respond generously to the love by which Our Lord has touch their hearts and called them into a closer relationship with Him. Indeed, as our society becomes more and more secular, it is truly encouraging to see the loving response of those who put their faith and trust in the Lord.

One of these inspiring people that I was with last week at the Napa Institute that I would like to tell you about was Father Robert Spitzer, a Catholic Priest in the Society of Jesus (commonly known as the Jesuits), who serves as President of the Magis Center for Science, Reason, and Faith, as well as President of the Spitzer Center for Visionary Leadership. Father Spitzer is one of the brightest people I have ever met. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy *Summa cum Laude* from the Catholic University of America in 1988 and served

as President of Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, from 1998 to 2009.

In 2011, Father Spitzer joined with Tim Busch to co-found the Napa Institute in an effort to empower Catholic leaders to renew the Church and transform the culture of our increasingly secular society. What makes Father Spitzer's achievements even more remarkable is that his eyesight has deteriorated due to macular degeneration over several years to the point where he is now nearly blind. He sees at about 5% of normal vision and must rely on the help of assistants to read to him and transcribe his dictated thoughts into writing. Despite this disability, Father Spitzer lectures brilliantly from memory, since he cannot read from notes or a prepared text.

Over the years I have been impressed and amused by the way he responds whenever we meet, as we did again a few months ago by chance at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport or when I attended the Napa Institute's summer conference last week. Without identifying myself, I will go up to him and say, "Father Spitzer, how are you?" Without missing a beat, he will respond, "Bishop Paprocki, nice to see you!"

What impresses me is his instantaneous recognition of my voice. What amuses me is his saying, "nice to see you," when I know that he is not literally

seeing me at all except perhaps as a blurry shadow. At first, I thought he was just using a polite greeting so as not to draw attention to his physical blindness, but I have come to understand that Father Spitzer does indeed see me in the image of me that he holds in his mind, even if not in the literal vision of his bodily eyes.

I thought of Father Spitzer's practice of seeing people in his mind even if not with his eyes recently when I was reading the scripture passage where Our Lord says, "Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear" (Matthew 13:16). Jesus was not talking literally about physical eyesight or hearing, but about seeing Him with the eyes of faith as Our Savior and hearing Him as the Word of God.

This is what we are called to do every time we come to Mass. We listen to the readings from the Bible not just as wise literature, but as God revealing His Word to us. When the bread and wine are consecrated and elevated before our eyes, many of us respond quietly to ourselves with the traditional affirmation of faith, using the words of Saint Thomas, by exclaiming, "My Lord and my God," even though what we are looking at appears to be simply a piece of bread and a cup of wine. Following the example of Father Spitzer, seeing the

image of Christ in our minds with the eyes of faith, we might add, "Jesus, it is good to see you!"

Sister Miriam, Sister Mary Giorgiana, Sister Mary Paul, and Sister Stana Maria: as you take this courageous step today in your journey of faith and the path of your vocation as Our Lord draws you into a deeper relationship of love with Him, may you always hear and heed His call to serve others and to see Christ in the Eucharist you will receive and in the people He asks you to love.

Open my eyes, Lord

Help me to see Your face

Open my eyes, Lord

Help me to see

Open my ears, Lord

Help me to hear Your voice

Open my ears, Lord

Help me to hear

Open my heart, Lord

Help me to love like You

Open my heart, Lord

Help me to love¹

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ "Open My Eyes," composed by Jesse Manibusan, published by Oregon Catholic Press, 1988.