

**Homily for the Diocesan Curia Respect Life Mass  
Feast of Saint Luke**

**October 18, 2023**

**Saint Viator Chapel at the Catholic Pastoral Center  
Springfield, Illinois**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Father(s), Deacons, consecrated religious, members of the Diocesan Curia, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good for us to be here for this Diocesan Curia Respect Life Mass prior to my Annual State of the Diocese Talk. Today is the feast day of Saint Luke, who according to early Church tradition was a physician, but of course he was also an Evangelist, writing the Gospel that bears his name.

Traditionally our Respect Life Mass every October during Respect Life Month focuses on opposing abortion and promoting respect for the lives of unborn babies from the moment of conception. In light of the violent attack perpetrated by Hamas against innocent civilian lives in Israel, including children, this year we need to focus promoting peace in the Middle East and throughout the world.

A couple of weeks ago, Monsignor Hoefler and I attended the annual investiture of the North Central Lieutenancy of the Equestrian Order of the

Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem held in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I have belonged to the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem since I was 35 years old. The “Equestrian” in the title comes from the historical origins of the Order tracing back to its participation as a cavalry fighting on horseback in the First Crusade to recover the Holy Land. The Order today is not involved in military operations but is still very much committed to assisting people in the Holy Land, especially in providing for the needs of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and of all the activities and initiatives to support the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

For the past several years, members of the Order have been asked to pray an extra decade of the rosary for the intention of peace in the Middle East. I have been doing so, adding my own specific intention of praying for an end to the hatred, fighting, and violence between Hamas and Israel, as well as between Israel and Hezbollah. About a month ago, after praying for this intention, I thought to myself that the situation in the Holy Land has been quiet recently and I hoped that this meant that Hamas, Hezbollah, and Israel were finally learning to coexist peacefully.

Unfortunately, this illusion was shattered with the violent attacks carried out by Hamas on October 7<sup>th</sup>, when militants from Gaza fired

thousands of rockets towards Israeli towns before breaking through the heavily fortified border fence with Israel and sending militants deep into Israeli territory. There, Hamas gunmen killed more than 1,400 people, including civilians, many of them children, and took more than 200 hostages, in what has been described as the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust.

A senior leader of Hamas has admitted that they were plotting this attack for years while pretending to project a peaceful image.

After years of prayer for peace, this is very discouraging.

Deception, discouragement, and death: these are the hallmarks of the work of the devil. We must recognize these atrocities as such and pray even more intensely for the protection of Saint Michael the Archangel in this battle with evil. We pray that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, with the intercession of Our Blessed Mother, the Queen of Peace, will help people to overcome their ancient hostilities and bring peace to the Holy Land and to the whole world.

We have just listened to St. Luke's account of Jesus commissioning the seventy-two disciples. This powerful scene contains many themes that we could consider. This morning, however, I want to reflect on just two questions that I think this passage raises, questions that are also especially

relevant to our work in our Diocesan Curia. First, what exactly is the harvest about which Jesus speaks? Second, who are the laborers for this harvest?

*What is the harvest?*

Jesus sends these disciples as laborers for what he calls the “abundant harvest.” In Luke’s gospel, it is not immediately clear what this harvest is. If we read Matthew’s account of this same scene, we see the immediate context for Jesus’ words about the harvest. There we read:

Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness. At the sight of the crowds, His heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest” (Mt 9:35–38).

In the eyes of Jesus, the crowds of lost and broken people were not an inconvenience to Him and His disciples, or a hindrance to the “real work” of their ministry. They were instead “the harvest,” the goal — they were the very reason that Jesus came. This is true for all of us: whatever our suffering,

affliction, or weakness might be, Jesus looks upon us with compassion and He sees us as ripe for the kingdom of God.

There is an old adage, "Love the sinner and hate the sin." The idea behind this is that we should never reduce people to the sins they commit, because even though sin harms them, they have a dignity and worth that their sins do not erase. We ask God for the grace to see people's goodness and lovability beyond their sins and vices, for they are the harvest of God's kingdom, the privileged recipients of His merciful love.

Now let us briefly consider: what does it mean to be laborer in this harvest? Many people see the seventy-two disciples sent by Jesus as ministers, perhaps even ordained ministers. In fact, Jesus' words, "Ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" are often used in promotional materials for priestly vocations. Of course, priests, deacons, and religious are certainly laborers working in God's harvest! But there is no reason to think that these seventy-two disciples were ordained ministers. They were committed disciples of Jesus whom He sent out to proclaim the kingdom of God by simply visiting people in their homes and praying for them.

Luke began this story with an important detail. He tells us that Jesus sent these disciples “ahead of him in pairs to every town and place He intended to visit” (Lk 10:1). The implication is that these disciples are not themselves the “harvesters.” Their role is only to prepare the way for Jesus, since he himself is going to visit the people in those towns. In a sense, this is what each of us can do as a laborer. At times, we may have the privilege of sharing the Gospel with someone who has never heard it before. More often, God will use us as instruments of His healing, consolation, and encouragement for those who already have the gift of faith.

But in either case, we know that Jesus is the Savior and the person they ultimately need. The Holy Spirit must bring about the growth of their faith. St. Paul speaks of this in his First Letter to the Corinthians. He writes:

What is Apollos, after all, and what is Paul? Ministers through whom you became believers, just as the Lord assigned each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth  
(1 Cor 3:5-7).

To be clear, preparing the way of the Lord is no small matter. As laborers for God's harvest, we are true instruments of His mercy. St. Paul writes elsewhere that "the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). When people experience God's love mediated through our words and actions, their hearts are opened to experience His love directly. When we experience genuine love, it provokes us to ask, "What is the source of this person's love and compassion? Why do they see people differently?"

This is especially the case when we are in a broken and vulnerable state. Knowing this, when people come to us in need, we can help them believe in love – or continue to believe in love. Then they will be more open to welcome Love Himself when He comes to them in their hearts, in His Word, and in the Sacraments. If we are true laborers, we will not be working only for the passing joys of this life, but for fruit that remains." It is our firm hope rooted in faith that one day we will see how everything we did contributed to God's great harvest of salvation, when God will say to us, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. [...] Come, share your master's joy" (Mt 25:21).

May God give us this grace. Amen.