

Homily for the Diocesan Mission Mass

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

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Reverend Fathers, deacons, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here today as we give praise and thanks to God for His entrusting us with the mission of building up the kingdom of God here on earth.

Throughout this beautiful Cathedral, you can find many examples of people who have contributed to this missionary work of the Church in various ways throughout her nearly two-thousand-year history. High atop the pillar closest to me is one of the first great missionaries, the Apostle St. Peter. The word apostle means “one who is sent out,” and he faithfully heeded the call of Jesus to “go... and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). St. Peter brought the Good News to Rome, which was the center of the modern world at the time. It is because of his missionary travels to Rome that, even to this day, we are called Roman Catholics.

On the other pillar in the sanctuary is the other great missionary Apostle, St. Paul. After having experienced a life-changing encounter with the Lord, St. Paul was baptized and then spent the rest of his life dedicated to bringing the message of the Gospel to people far and wide, resulting in a great increase in the number of Christians.

Other examples of great missionaries include St. James the Greater, just behind me, who brought the faith to the people of Spain. On the north wall you will see a little shrine dedicated to St. Patrick, also known as the Apostle of Ireland for his work of bringing the faith to the people of that country. In the back, northeast corner next to the reconciliation room is St. Anthony of Padua, a great preacher who did missionary work in Morocco and in his home country of Italy. In the opposite corner is a statue of St. Dominic, another great preacher who founded a religious order which continues to contribute today to the teaching and spreading of the faith throughout the world.

There is one more missionary commemorated here in our Cathedral. That missionary is St. Therese of the Child Jesus, often better recognized under her title as the Little Flower. She is one of the two patron saints for the missions.

It is interesting that she holds such a significant title, because after entering the convent at the age of 15, she was never able to engage in what we would normally consider missionary work. She did not travel to any distant countries to bring the message of the Gospel to those who had not heard it. She was not able to join other missionaries in bringing the love and compassion of Christ to the suffering and the poor of the world. Yet, she had a great desire to be a missionary and therefore dedicated her life to praying and offering sacrifices for those who were engaging in those important works on behalf of the Church.

Her example is truly an inspiration for each and every one of us. She shows us that sharing in the missionary work of the Church is available to everybody, regardless of the state in life in which we find ourselves. She was very aware that each member of the Church represents a different part of the one Body of Christ, all with a different function, all ordered toward a common goal. She saw her part as being within the heart of the Church, a part which, although hidden, is essential to the life of the Church.

The same is true for each one of us. On the day that we were baptized, we became members of this same body, and God invites us to share in the work of the rest of the body.

Saint Francis of Assisi, whose feast day we celebrate today, once said:

O how happy and blessed are those who love the Lord and do as the Lord himself said in the gospel: *You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and your whole soul; and your neighbor as yourself.* Therefore, let us love God and adore him with pure heart and mind. This is His particular desire when He says: *True worshippers adore the Father in spirit and truth.* For all who adore him must do so in the spirit of truth. Let us also direct to him our praises and prayers saying: *Our Father, who art in heaven, since we must always pray and never grow slack.* Furthermore, let us produce worthy fruits of penance. Let us also love our neighbors as ourselves. Let us have charity and humility. Let us give alms because these cleanse our souls from the stains of sin. ... The Spirit of the Lord will rest on all who live in this way and persevere in it to the end. He will permanently dwell in them. They will be the Father's children who do his work.¹

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us use these words as a framework in which to live our lives and recognize our obligation to build up the kingdom of God in the midst of the world today.

Perhaps some of you are called to work as missionaries, bringing the faith to the four corners of the world. Some of you young men are likely

being called to be priests who have a very special role to play in the mission of the Church by bringing the sacraments to the people of God. Some of you young women may be called to be like St. Therese to embrace the religious life. Others will be married and have children, called to perform the important missionary work of spreading the faith to the next generation.

It is important to recognize that none of us can see ourselves as unimportant to the work of the missions. The missionary work of the Church happens on every level, at every age, and in every location throughout the world, whether it be our homes and schools here in Illinois, or in the streets and villages of the poorest places on earth. Regardless of where the Lord calls us to be of service to His Church, we must always see ourselves as being on mission. To try to understand the Church without the element of mission is to misunderstand the true meaning of the Church as founded by Jesus Christ.

As children, your participation in the missionary work of the Church does not have to wait until you get older. You are a missionary now! As you move toward discovering what your vocation will be in life, you can imitate the example of St. Therese. We are encouraged to keep the work of missionaries always in our prayers. They are on the front lines of spreading

the faith and are exposed to many challenges. They benefit greatly from our support. We should also be close to our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are struggling to survive, either due to lack of food, water and shelter, or due to dangerous circumstances in which they live. In a particular way, we pray for those whose lives are threatened daily because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

In just a moment, I will invite all of you to commit yourselves to being active members in the work of the missions through the Holy Childhood Association. By promising to offer your prayers, sacrifices, and love so that people throughout the world will come to know the great love of God, you will be following the command that Jesus gives us to *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.*² May this commitment motivate you to renew your desire to live the life of a missionary disciple not just in word and thought, but in actions which bring the love of God to people everywhere so that all of us can be united as one Body in the glory of Heaven forever.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ From a letter written to all the faithful by Saint Francis of Assisi (Opuscula, edit. Quaracchi 1949, 87-94).

² Matthew 28: 19