

**Homily for Mass Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of
St. Jude Parish
Rochester, Illinois**

**July 6, 2024
14th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good that we are here for this Mass, during which we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Saint Jude Parish. I congratulate you on celebrating your parish's Golden Jubilee and I commend you for the wonderful ways that the Catholic faith is lived out in the life of Saint Jude Parish. I am grateful that two of your former pastors are here to concelebrate: Father Brian Alford and Father Chuck Edwards. Father Alford served as your Pastor from 2016 to 2020; since that time he continues to serve as the Rector of our Cathedral in Springfield. Father Chuck is awaiting approval from the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs so he could begin serving as Chaplain at the Illinois Veterans' Home in Quincy, Illinois. Father Chuck, we are grateful for your service as Pastor here for the past four years and we wish you God's blessings in your new ministry. We also express our appreciation to Father Dean Probst, who served as Pastor here from 2006 to

2016, and is now Pastor Emeritus of St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Newton and St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Sainte Marie, Illinois. He is keeping busy these days filling in as needed at various parishes throughout our diocese!

Another one of our senior priests who still has a lot of energy for ministry is Father John Burnette. Thank you, Father John, for agreeing to provide for the pastoral care of St. Jude Parish until their new Pastor, Father Peter Chineke, returns from his canon law studies in August.

In September of 2015, I traveled to Philadelphia for the visit of Pope Francis to the United States in conjunction with the World Meeting of Families, an event which brought together more than twenty thousand people to celebrate the gift of marriage and family life. At the final keynote address for the congress, Cardinal Sean O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston, told a story about a parish celebration in which he participated when he was a bishop in the West Indies. The occasion of the celebration was to recognize a couple who had been married for fifty years. Before the Mass, he asked the couple about their secret to a successful marriage. The husband responded that he and his wife, on the day of their marriage, had

come up with a scientific manner in which to make all of the decisions for their life together.

When the Cardinal asked what that scientific formula looked like, the husband responded that it was really quite simple. They had decided that he would make all of the big decisions, and she would make all of the small decisions. When asked how that had worked for half a century, the husband responded that it had actually been working quite well, except that, in all in those fifty years, they had not had any big decisions to make!

The Cardinal was quick to remind the audience, though, that both the husband and the wife had indeed made one very important big decision together, and that big decision was to love. That decision to love was the one that carried them day in and day out through their life with one another.

That is a very fitting way to reflect on what we celebrate today, how the parishioners of Saint Jude Parish for fifty years have made that big decision to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. In this way, your parish is also a family, and every joy and blessing in your parish

family has been the fruit of that decision to love, and every obstacle overcome, every issue resolved, has been because of the power of love.

It can be an interesting exercise to look back in history to see what was going on in our world when we celebrate events such as this. These are some of the key events that happened in 1974:

- On January 2nd, President Richard Nixon signed the National Maximum Speed Law Enactment, a bill that lowered the maximum U.S. speed limit to 55 MPH in order to conserve gasoline during the OPEC oil embargo.
- On February 12th, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1970, was exiled from the Soviet Union.
- On March 1st, seven people were indicted for their role in the Watergate break-in and charged with conspiracy to obstruct justice.
- On June 1st, the Heimlich maneuver for rescuing choking victims was published in the journal, *Emergency Medicine*.
- August 8th, President Richard Nixon, in a nationwide television address, announced his resignation from the office of the President of the United States, effective noon the next day. Vice President Gerald Ford then became president.

- On September 25th, the first ulnar collateral ligament replacement surgery was performed on baseball player Tommy John. The procedure became known as Tommy John surgery. By the way, he was my favorite player when he pitched for the Chicago White Sox because we shared the same names, Tommy John!
- On October 30th, as a member of the California Angels, Major League Baseball player Nolan Ryan threw the fastest pitch ever recorded at the time, at 100.9 MPH.
- In 1974, the Pope was Pope Paul VI and the Bishop of Springfield in Illinois was Bishop William O'Connor.
- Also in 1974, I graduated from Niles College Seminary of Loyola University and began studying theology at Mundelein Seminary!

It is in this context that Saint Jude Parish began and has grown over the past half century as a community of faith. Today, as we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Catholic life at Saint Jude Parish, we are mindful of the many ways in which the faithful here have lived great lives, not necessarily to draw attention to themselves, but to give glory to God and to reach out in love to others. The strength of this community, especially as it concerns

the Catholic faith, is a wonderful sign of vitality. It is my prayer that this Catholic community of faith will continue to be strong now and for many more years into the future.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that the path of Christian life is not always easy. Our readings today suggest that we – as individuals and as members of Christian community – must speak prophetically at times against anything we see going on that goes against Christian values.

In today's first reading, the ears of the Israelites are closed to God's message and to God's messenger, Ezekiel. In the Gospel, those who knew Jesus as a child cannot accept Him and the message He proclaims as the Messiah, the Son of God. The people from Jesus' hometown simply could not get past the Jesus they knew in order to receive the word of God. Like Ezekiel and Jesus, we may find ourselves facing a tough crowd uninterested in hearing the Good News we have to share. There is often a cost to remaining true to our Christian identity. The Word of God reminds us today to remain faithful to His call, preaching that word of love, faithfulness, justice, and truth everywhere we go—even to the "rough

crowds.” That very word has the power to save, bless, strengthen, and heal others in Jesus’ name.

As the Catholic Church in the United States prepares to celebrate our National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis this month, may our reception of the Eucharist today enflame our hearts to desire to live the faith into which we have been baptized. May we never miss an opportunity to do all things, small or large, with true love. May that spirit of love for one another continue to spread throughout this parish so that this will be a place where Jesus, who welcomes us in love, is in return welcomed and loved in one another.

Let us prepare ourselves now to receive the perfect gift of love, Jesus Christ Himself, in the Holy Eucharist. May our hearts be enflamed with a greater desire to give a more resounding ‘yes’ to His love in all of our actions, for in doing so, we contribute in a significant way to turning our world from a culture of death to a culture of love, a culture in which the Kingdom of God is built up and the fullness of love in Heaven, meant for all of us, draws closer and closer to its fulfillment.

May God give us this grace. Amen.