

**Homily for the Springfield Diocesan Council of Catholic Women  
Mass for the Women of Distinction Awards**

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

**10<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time | June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024 A.D.**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, members of various Councils of Catholic Women throughout our diocese, in particular those who have been put forward by your parishes to be given the title of “Woman of Distinction,” welcome! It is good for us to be here. I am grateful to you for the generosity and fidelity that led your parishes to submit your name for this honor today. I am grateful to your family and friends who are here to support you, as well as to many of your pastors who have kept their Saturday mornings clear to come today. Brothers, I know you all are heading back to full weekends, so thank you for making the trip this morning, and a happy Father’s Day tomorrow to each of you who are spiritual fathers to your parishioners. I also extend a word of gratitude to all the women involved in our Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, and everyone else who helped to prepare for the Mass and celebration today; your sacrifices have helped us to receive many graces from Our Lord.

You may have noticed that on many occasions I begin my homilies using St. Peter's words at the Transfiguration of Our Lord, "It is good for us to be here." Perhaps these words seem fitting for the grand occasions for which we come together as a diocese, such as an ordination, or our Eucharistic Congress last October, or a day like today, when we have women from all across our diocese to celebrate your being named "women of distinction." But I frequently use this phrase for even the simplest homily when celebrating Mass for a just small group on a weekday. I do this because though what is visible to our eyes may not be as wondrous as the Transfiguration, or as moving as was our Eucharistic Congress, or as joyous as our celebration today, *the essence* of our celebration is the same. Every time we join for Mass, whether it feels extraordinary or not, is just as much an encounter with the risen and glorified Christ, and those words of our first Holy Father, "It is good for us to be here," remind me of this truth.

I take this opportunity today to reflect on the way this is true, not just when we attend Mass, but also on other occasions of our Christian life when we have an encounter with Christ and *this happens constantly in our normal lives*. Just as we can underestimate the power of a typical daily Mass, we can also lose sight of the ways Christ is present to us in our ordinary daily lives.

Think back to our first reading. Elijah, the great prophet, comes upon Elisha, a young man from a well-off family who is plowing their fields with a large yoke of oxen. Elijah approaches him and throws his own cloak over Elisha's shoulders. It was a typical gesture of passing-the-baton in the Ancient Near East, often used to deputize a follower or pass a sacred office onto someone else. It seems that Elisha knew this because he exclaims, "Please, let me kiss my father and mother good-bye, and I will follow you." But Elijah's response might puzzle us: "Go back! What have I done to you?" He seems to be giving Elisha complete freedom here. He has offered him to become a prophet of the Lord, but he does not demand it.

Now, perhaps this seems far removed from any of us, not only the gestures and turns of phrase used in Ancient Israel, but also it seems unlikely any of us will be asked to be a prophet like Elijah or Elisha. However, the Lord offers us grace every day. He clothes us in the robes of one of His sons or daughters. He gives us the gift of natural life, but also supernatural life. The Holy Spirit has been given to our hearts and speaks to us every day. We are prophets in a sense. Every baptized person is gifted with the identity of prophet, priest, and king, as is Jesus, and though most of us are not called to manifest that prophetic character in dramatic ways, we are called to an

obedience to the voice of God in our hearts, and the will of God in our lives. Indeed, every time we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, not only do we offer a witness to the world as prophets of sorts, but we also have an encounter with Christ. "It is good for us to be here."

Women of distinction, I want to talk specifically to you, and all the ladies here today, in this regard. Our world is very hurried, always racing onto the next thing. Our lives are often cluttered; we surround ourselves with noise and distractions of all sorts to avoid going deeper or risking the slow work of love. Even our parishes can succumb to this worldly way of existing - hurrying, worrying, bustling, making ends meet - but the feminine genius often allows you to put a higher priority on listening, on receiving, on nurturing, on being sensitive to the voice of God, and the presence of God in the people around you.

Our world needs your witness in this! Our Church needs your witness in this! Our Lady was the one attentive enough to hear the angel approach and say "Hail, Mary." Another Mary, the sister of Lazarus, was the one disciple who knew that the most important thing was simply to be with Jesus. Mother Teresa saw Jesus in the beggars in Calcutta and was not content to leave them hungry, unloved, never having encountered Christ.

Women of Distinction, do not underestimate the power, in an ordinary day, of simply noticing the presence of God and reminding us all to do the same, to slow down, and say, “It is good for us to be here.”

Our Gospel takes us to Saint Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has already given the beatitudes, and then boldly plunged into the “hot topics” of His own day, and ours – obedience to God, forgiveness of all, purity of heart, faithfulness in marriage – and today He teaches us to “Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’ Anything more is from the evil one.” The Divine Physician has been walking slowly through the human heart – our will, our relationships, our desires, our commitments – and now turns to our capacity to *speak*. On the one hand, Jesus calls us to a tremendously high standard of life, but this is not just theoretical moralizing. Jesus knows our hearts, and He knows that when we begin to swear, or curse, or use our words in a hurtful or disparaging or manipulative way, it does not just scandalize or injure our neighbor, it also distorts and shackles our own hearts.

In some ways, this continues the truth Our Lord began teaching us from Elijah and Elisha. If our hearts are filled with improper, or even just unnecessary, words, we will not be able to hear the words of God, or say the words of God. Moreover, as Our Lord indicates by adding the phrase,

“Anything more is from the evil one,” if we are filled with distorted truths, we will not just find ourselves disconnected from God, but our words will be twisted into the falsehoods of the Father of Lies. This does not mean to suggest that the Devil has possessed us when we swear, or take God’s name in vain, or gossip, or complain, we are possessed, but the fact is that those twisted words settle into our hearts and we begin to listen to the promptings of the Evil One more than the words of Christ. Sometimes this means that our words do damage to our family or friends, but even if they do not, they almost certainly begin to cloud our own perception of ourselves or sense of God’s voice of Love.

Swearing is one way this happens – we swear to try to defend or protect ourselves, to be seen as not being weak, to stay in control of a situation, to intimidate or manipulate someone else – but notice what happens within us when we succumb to this temptation. We do not just hurt others, but we have subtly denied God’s Providence, His care, His protection, His giving us our daily bread. In a similar way, whenever we let another voice into our minds and hearts, a voice that is not God’s, we allow the Evil One sway over our lives, and that will only lead to worry, bitterness, resistance, or discouragement. In such cases, it is *NOT* good for us to be in that place!

Women of distinction, and all the ladies present here today, I speak again directly to you. Thank you for the ways your example often pushes back against the harshness and vitriol that these days is sadly rampant in our culture. You have been given a particular gift to hold in mind the position of another, to weigh your words carefully, to extend a motherly concern to someone who needs it. Lean into those gifts! Do not undervalue the impact of a mother's love! But also, if I may add a word of caution, we must not only commit ourselves to outward speech that befits our lives as Christians, but also our inner voice with which we speak to ourselves must also be like Christ's. Many of you, I know, have radiated love out and around you in amazing ways, but when you do your daily examination of conscience, or confide in a close friend, do not forget to extend the same patience and compassion to yourself. All our words – those said aloud, and those we say to ourselves – should sound like the Good Shepherd. When they do, it is indeed “good for us to be here.”

Just as I often start my homilies by saying that “It is good for us to be here,” you may have also noticed that I usually end my homilies with the phrase, “May God give us this grace.” I was inspired to adopt this way of concluding my homilies by the example of Saint Francis de Sales, who often ended his sermons with this phrase. My appointment as a bishop by Pope Saint

John Paul II was announced on January 24, 2003, the Memorial of Saint Francis de Sales, who served as Bishop of Geneva in Switzerland in the Sixteenth Century. Since he was a bishop, I pray to him for guidance in my exercise of the pastoral office of bishop. In my chapel here at the Cathedral Rectory, I have an icon of Saint Francis de Sales holding a copy of his most famous book, *Introduction to the Devout Life*. I draw inspiration from this image, which I look at frequently when I pray.

It is my fervent prayer and hope that whatever I say in my homilies will bear fruit through the gift of God's grace in the lives of all who hear them.

May God give us this grace. Amen.