

**Homily Outline for the Feast Day of Our Lady of Perpetual Help
and the
Blessing of the Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help
at
Mother of Perpetual Help Church
Maryville, Illinois**

June 23, 2024

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

- I. It is good to be here in Maryville to celebrate the Feast Day of Mother of Perpetual Help Parish and to blessing of the Icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help at Mother of Perpetual Help Church.
 - A. A parish has a special connection to the Saint it is named after.
 - 1. It shows the uniqueness and personality in the diversity and colorfulness that Catholicism offers.
 - 2. You are blessed to belong to a parish named after our Blessed Mother, the greatest of all Saints.
 - 3. St. Therese: “Mary is more mother than queen!”
 - B. Nothing is stronger than the love of a Mom. Our Blessed Mother is ready to help us at every moment, every breath we take...perpetually!
- II. Where does the title “Our Mother of Perpetual Help” comes from?
 - A. One of the most well-known icons in the world: A Byzantine icon of the Madonna and Child that is believed to have its origin sometime during the 13th - 15th centuries.
 - B. Over the centuries countless healings and special graces have been attributed to it, so much so that the image has been honored and venerated by many Popes.

- C. You can still pray in front of the original Icon at the Church of St. Alphonsus in Rome.
- III. Today we have the blessing of a reprint of the icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.
- A. This icon was given to me by the priests of the Society of Saint John Cantius, who staff Saint Katharine Drexel Parish in Springfield.
 - 1. Their motto is "To Restore the Sacred."
 - 2. They try to find suitable homes for sacred objects.
 - 3. I thought: there is no better place in our diocese for an icon of Our Lady of Perpetual Help than here at Mother of Perpetual Help Parish, so I am happy to pass it on to you!
 - B. An icon is an image of a holy person or event created by an iconographer.
 - C. An icon is not worshiped, but rather venerated and used in prayer.
 - 1. Traditionally unsigned, icons are considered a window or portal into a divine realm.
 - 2. An icon is a complex set of interwoven symbols that have evolved over centuries to form a refined and sophisticated visual language. When reading an icon, colors, clothing, hairstyles, gestures, and objects the subject holds all offer insight into what the iconographer was trying to convey.
- IV. The whole Christian mystery of redemption is played out/represented in the icon of Our Mother (or Our Lady) of Perpetual Help.
- A. Three details to point out:
 - 1. The Archangels Michael and Gabriel, hovering in the upper corners, hold the instruments of the Passion. St. Michael (in the left corner) holds the spear, the wine-soaked sponge, and the crown of thorns. St. Gabriel (in the right corner) holds the cross and the nails → The Christian life does not exist without the Cross.

2. The sandal of Jesus is broken, showing he has run to the arms of Mary. In a very beautiful way, the Child Jesus grasps the hand of the Blessed Mother. He seeks comfort from His mother as He sees the instruments of His passion. The position of Mary's hands – both holding the Child Jesus (who seems like a small adult) and at the same time presenting Him to us – convey the reality of our Lord's incarnation, that He is true God who became also true man. → Go to Mary, she will always take you to Jesus!
3. Despite a foreboding vision of suffering, the icon also conveys the triumph of Christ over sin and death, symbolized by the golden background as a sign of the glory of the resurrection. The royal crowns on the heads of Jesus and Mary also symbolize their triumph as the King of Kings with his Queen Mother. → The Cross is a sign of Hope and Victory!

V. Mary is the Mother of Perpetual Help; she is the Mother of God, which means that God is our Perpetual Help.

A. In our first reading today, the world is heavy for Job, filled with suffering, despair, and fear. One thing after another goes wrong, and Job can't make sense of the pain.

1. I am sure many of us have experienced this before. So Job cries out to God. But God doesn't respond as we might imagine. God doesn't immediately take away all of Job's difficulty or pain, promising him an easy life.
2. Rather, like a loving father who calms the fear of his child with his love, God pulls the trembling Job close to His heart and reminds him that He loves him and has loved him since the beginning of the world. Love casts out all fear.

B. Our second reading starts with the fact that Paul had a broken past.

1. For us, too, many of our fears today are bound up in past experiences that continue to bring us guilt and shame.

2. Jesus healed Paul's past and released him from the bondage of his past mistakes. In Christ, Paul became a new creation.
3. Freed from fear, Paul has a new future: "The old things have passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

C. In the Gospel, the disciples were afraid, even terrified.

1. Our lives, too, can feel like a storm for various reasons: financial uncertainty or risk, strained relationships, health problems, etc.
2. Jesus didn't seem particularly perturbed that his disciples asked him to calm the storm. Rather, his disappointment most likely came from the fact they doubted his love for them: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38).
3. The Gospel seems to be absolutely clear about two things that Jesus' disciples need to know and, therefore, that each of us needs to know:
 - a) Jesus loves each and every one of us and does not want us to suffer.
 - b) Jesus wants us to ask Him for whatever we need to calm the storms of our lives, and to have faith that He will take care of us.

D. We turn to our Mother of Perpetual Help for her intercession, asking her son Jesus to help us in our needs.

1. If you are experiencing fear as suffering, despair, or anxiety, as Job did, ask God to pull you close, to embrace you in such a way that you know you have all you need.
2. If you are experiencing fear as shame and guilt, like Paul, go to confession and ask Jesus to break the chains of old sins, habits, and events, so that you can experience newness of life and redemption.
3. If you feel the storm and, like the disciples are terrified, Jesus is waiting for you to ask him to speak that powerful command into your world: "Be calm; be still."

VI. May God give us this grace. Amen.