

**Homily for the Memorial Mass for William "Bill" Vogt
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

May 1, 2024

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

Your Excellency, Archbishop Lucas, my brother priests, deacons, [consecrated men and women religious], my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here as we celebrate this Memorial Mass for William "Bill" Vogt, who passed from this life on Saturday, February 17, 2024. As a very private person never wanted attention on himself, Bill had asked not to have a Funeral Mass, but knowing Bill as well as I do, I know he would not object to the request of his bishop to celebrate this Mass for the repose of his soul. I think he would also appreciate that we who knew and loved him would want the opportunity to offer him our greatest sign of gratitude, the gift of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, in which we commend Bill to the mercy of God. For that reason, I am grateful to all of you for coming here and participating in this Memorial Mass for Bill today.

In our Second Reading from the First Letter of St. John, though short in length, we hear words which speak well of Bill. St. John writes:

“The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16). This is indeed what Bill has done: he laid down his life for his brothers and sisters.

As we look at the variety of people gathered here in this Cathedral church that Bill loved, we see the many ways which, for love of God, Bill laid down his life for others in Christian service. Having never married, Bill was able to lay down his life for the Cathedral in a way that was truly inspiring. Laying down his life in service meant often coming in to work by 5:00 AM as he set about his daily duties, including assuring that our candles in our devotional shrines were always well-stocked. He would get the laundry going, making sure there were always clean, well-pressed altar linens. He ensured the other liturgical supplies were always stocked, and handled a whole host of other details that we are only now beginning to appreciate. He would ensure that the staff had something to eat for lunch, and he would often prepare dinner for the priests of the house. But more than what Bill did is who he was, and what his presence meant to all of us gathered here in various ways.

First of all, I welcome my brother Bishop, Archbishop George Lucas, Archbishop of Omaha, and my immediate predecessor as former Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. I know that he joins me in giving thanks to God for the particular dedication Bill had to the three bishops under which he served. To list the many ways in which Bill has shown great care to the shepherds of this diocese would take too long, but suffice it to say each act of service, many of which remained unknown to most, have been greatly appreciated.

If somebody were to randomly walk into this Mass today, they might assume we were celebrating a Mass for a deceased priest, considering the good number of priests present here in the sanctuary. Your presence here is a testament to the faithfulness with which Bill served the many priests of the diocese, in particular those who have had the privilege of living and ministering here at the Cathedral. Bill's kindness and selfless, unassuming nature was a source of great peace and joy to these priests. In his more than thirty years of working here at the Cathedral, Bill served under five different Rectors, beginning with Monsignor John Ossola, who hired him in 1993, to Father Peter Harman, Father John Nolan, Father Christopher House, and our current Rector,

Father Brian Alford. I know that all of them share their great admiration and gratitude for the many forms of support Bill has shown to them over the years. The same can be said for the many other priests who have called Cathedral their home for part of their priesthood. Bill's love and dedication to the priests is a gift for which we are all grateful. Bill himself was briefly in the seminary, so perhaps this was a way for him to show his love for the priesthood, even if the Lord did not call him to that vocation.

For all of you gathered here in the congregation, you represent the many different roles and relationships that Bill had with so many. I note in particular the staff members who have served with him here at the Cathedral Parish office. Given the long hours he spent here, in many ways, you were his family, and you have been blessed with a great collaborator in this important work. While the Cathedral School was still in operation, Bill was involved in a variety of ways, impacting teachers and students alike, some of whom are with us today. He would often make sure the staff of the Cathedral had something to eat for lunch, and would on many nights prepare the evening meal for me and the priests of the house.

A small but typical example of Bill's concern for others was when he prepared his signature liver with bacon and onions as a special treat every once in a while for me, Father Alford, and Monsignor Hoefler, because he knew we liked that, but he also knew that not everyone liked it, so he would make sure there was something else available, whether it was for one of the priests or one of the staff members who was present to help. We could go on and on with other ways in which Bill was connected to the various people gathered here, suffice it to say that one word could summarize who Bill was to all of us – he was our friend.

The Gospel for this Mass comes from Matthew chapter 25, known as the Judgment of the Nations. In this pivotal passage, Jesus tells His disciples and us the importance of service when it comes to the judgment that awaits us at the end of our lives. To those who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, visited those in prison, the Lord will say: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mt 25:34). To be sure, Bill did this in a quiet, dedicated way, and one would not dedicate upwards of 15 hours a day for more than 30 years if he were not motivated by the love of God, which Bill undoubtedly was. In so many

ways, he helped to bring the light of Christ to others, not so much in what he said, for as you know, he was a man of few words. Rather, he reflected the light of Christ through his life, and how blessed we all are to have been warmed and encouraged by the light of Christ radiating from Bill.

It is also fitting that we celebrate this Mass for Bill on this Memorial of Saint Joseph the Worker, for Bill certainly imitated Saint Joseph in working quietly behind the scenes without bringing attention to himself to care for his family, in Bill's case, for his family here at the Cathedral.

After all of the many good deeds Bill has done for us, it is now our opportunity to do him a great act of charity, by praying for the repose of his soul. On the final day of his life, a rather busy one here at the Cathedral, all of the clergy of the Cathedral, including myself, the priests, and Deacon Larry, along with a few other staff members, were able to visit him to give him our final goodbye. As he lay in his hospital bed, worn out from his many years of laboring for the Church, he was preparing for his final rest. I was grateful for the opportunity to thank him for his dedicated service to the Church and to me and my predecessors, for whom he had so much esteem and respect for the office

of bishop. He was not able to speak, but he squeezed my hand, and I could see the look of gratitude and affection in his eyes. It was our privilege to see him one last time and to see him looking upon us with love, the family he had come to know and serve so well.

As we gather for this Mass, we his Cathedral family past and present, hand him over to the mercy of God, with the great hope that Bill's many good works will accompany him, along with our prayers, so that he can hear those hopeful words he so deserves to hear: "Well done, my good and faithful servant...Come, share your master's joy" (Mt. 25:23).

May God give us this grace. Amen.