

**Homily for the Mass and Confirmation of Mrs. Jessica Hollensteiner
at St. Anthony of Padua Church
Quincy, Illinois**

**December 1, 2024
8:00 AM Mass**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

A powerfully moving and memorable event took place this past July in Indianapolis, where 60,000 Catholics gathered for our National Eucharistic Congress, and countless more joined us via livestream. We had a smaller but still very significant version of this in our own diocese with our Diocesan Eucharistic Congress held in the BOS Convention Center in Springfield, with 5,000 participants in October of 2023. Our Diocesan Eucharistic Congress and the National Eucharistic Congress were major parts of the National Eucharistic Revival, which now continues with a special Year of Mission. This Year of Mission calls for Catholics to share their rekindled love of the Eucharist with other people. This is an essential aspect of our being disciples of Jesus Christ and stewards of God's gifts of creation.

As our Mass this morning, I will administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to Mrs. Jessica Hollensteiner, whose sponsor is her husband, Patrick Hollensteiner. They are both members of the Quincy Police Department. We thank you both for your service in helping to protect our community. We pray that the Holy Spirit will strengthen you and protect you, and we ask St. Michael the Archangel to defend you in your battles against evil.

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* - paragraph # 1832). If we are mindful of the gifts and fruits that the Holy Spirit has placed in our hearts, we will live in a very different and much better way than if we allow our hearts to be dominated by the seven capital or deadly sins: pride, envy, anger, avarice, gluttony, lust, and sloth. Hearts full of sinful desires will be manifested in a life of vice. Hearts full of God's grace will be reflected in a life of virtue.

Today is the First Sunday of Advent, a season of preparation. While many people would assume this preparation means preparing for Christmas, the truth is that the focus on Jesus' birth becomes predominant only in the season's last nine days, December 16-24. That is when the Gospels specifically center on the historical birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. The first part of Advent, however, is not focused on Jesus' first coming in Bethlehem, but on His second coming at the end of time. In that sense, it continues the focus on the end times that the Mass readings highlighted during the last weeks of Ordinary Time. The Thirty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time and the First Sunday of Advent always have a judgment theme, either the Lord's return at the end of time, which we hear about in Ordinary Time, or the need for watchfulness and sober readiness for that coming, which we read in the scriptures at the beginning of Advent. The Solemnity of Christ the King hinges them together: Jesus is King of the Universe.

Thus, we need to be preparing not for a past event, but a future one. That is why, at every Mass, after the Our Father, the priest prays that the Lord will deliver us from every evil, "keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Thus, in our scripture readings today, Jeremiah (Jer 33:14-16) points forward to the time of the Messiah, framing it as the time of the fulfilment of God's promise to Israel that salvation will come – a beautiful prophecy that will console the people in times of tribulation. However bad things seem, God wills the people to be saved, and will act on their behalf.

Jesus is more direct in the Gospel passage from Saint Luke (Lk 21:25-28, 34-36). Jesus urges His disciples to be “vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man.” He is telling His disciples that a time is coming when there will be massive upheaval, the like of which people have not seen before; but His message is not that the disciples should be afraid, but that they should see such calamity as a sign of the closeness of their liberation. Jesus urges the disciples, understanding this, to stand with confidence. They will remember this in the terrible time ahead, when their Lord will be tortured and put to death, and they will subsequently learn that in His resurrection, the tumult was a sign that their salvation was indeed near at hand.

That Jesus urges the disciples to virtuous living is not so that they will be virtuous as an end in itself, but so that they will be attentive, prepared,

not taken by surprise at the return of the Son of Man in glory. They must stay alert, pray for strength – and then stand with confidence.

Paul seeks to inspire the Thessalonians (1 Thes 3:12-4:2) to follow his example of love, loving each other and loving the whole of humanity. This, he explains, is so that they will be prepared for the return of the Lord. Paul has taken the teaching of Jesus to heart and urges attentiveness so that they will be ready to meet their Lord. The community of believers Paul is addressing are already living an authentic Christian life and he encourages them to continue to make progress in that life.

What can we do to prepare ourselves to meet the Lord? We are attentive to His presence, looking for Him where He is to be found. We begin with where we are now: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be in their midst” says Jesus – so He is here among us today. Jesus is present in the proclamation of his word – we stand for the Gospel, acknowledging the presence of the Risen Lord. Jesus is present in the Eucharist, a truth we learn from the accounts of the Last Supper and His teaching that we heard earlier this year in the readings from chapter 6 of John’s Gospel, where Jesus refers to Himself as the Bread of Life. We are attentive to Jesus present in those who are in desperate need, as Jesus taught

that: "Insofar as you did this [i.e. offered help] to the least of my brothers, you did this to me." Moreover, we are attentive to the presence of Jesus when we address Him and listen to Him in prayer. Being attentive to the Lord, we will be prepared and able to stand with confidence before the Son of Man when He returns in glory - and when we are called from this life to the eternal life He has promised.

Finally, this part of the church is called the sanctuary because a sanctuary is a place for that which is sacred, and Our Lord comes to us here at Mass and remains present in the tabernacle. As we go forth from here after receiving Holy Communion, we carry Christ with us in our hearts, so in a sense we all become a living sanctuary of Our Lord. May your hearts be the sanctuary where His love resides more fully, to the point of overflowing, so that through you, His merciful love will be made visible.

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary

Pure and holy, tried and true

With thanksgiving, I'll be a living

Sanctuary for You.¹

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ John W. Thompson and Randy Scruggs, "Sanctuary" (Full Armor Publishing Company, 1982).