

**Homily for the Mass celebrating 100 years of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr
St. George serving in the United States of America**

December 17, 2024

**Saint Viator Chapel at the Catholic Pastoral Center
Springfield, Illinois**

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

Reverend Father(s), Deacons, consecrated religious, members of the Diocesan Curia, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good for us to be here for this Mass together with Sister M. Catherine, Sister M. Clementia, and Sister M. Alexandra, as we join them in celebrating 100 years of their community, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George, serving in the United States of America. After Mass and Adoration, our celebration will continue with a slide show of the history of their community, so I will not try to recount that history now. Eucharist means to give thanks, so at this Eucharistic celebration, I mainly want to say thank you to the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George in our diocese and pray for God's blessings upon your apostolic works for many more years to come.

The setting for today's first reading from the Book of Genesis is Jacob's deathbed, where he is blessing his sons and enlightening them about their future destinies. This section of a much longer narrative focuses on Judah.

Contained in Jacob's comments to him is an allusion to David, a future king of Israel. The opening lines of the narrative include a Hebrew play on words on the name Judah, which means "they shall praise." From the reconstructed historical perspective, Judah's family members acknowledged his great military prowess captured through a simile: Judah is like a young lion. The lion is thought to be the strongest and greatest of all animals – the king of beasts – and here Judah is a young lion in the process of maturation. The reference to the scepter and mace not departing from Judah alludes to the never-ending lineage that the Davidic monarchy will enjoy.

The blessing that Judah receives from Jacob contains a prophetic vision that will not be realized in Judah's lifetime, but rather in the lifetime of his descendants. Divine prophetic promises are often communicated through human beings. Furthermore, Jacob's words to Judah remind us that the power of blessing is much more than a ritual of wishing someone well, but of asking for divine favor.

This Old Testament reference to the Lion of Judah is a prophecy pointing to Jesus, as St. John the Evangelist wrote in the Book of Revelation (5:5), "Do not weep. The lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed, enabling him to open the scroll with its seven seals."

The ring I am wearing today is a gift that my friend Ed Grossman got for me when he visited the Holy Land while we were classmates in law school. This ring has the image of the Lion of Judah, so it has great significance for both Christians and Jews.

Today's Gospel open with the genealogy of Jesus. While St. Luke's Gospel traces Our Lord's parentage backward step by step to Adam, St. Matthew's Gospel begins by setting out *the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham*, and then traces his human descent by bringing his ancestral line down to his mother's husband, Joseph. Jesus' lineage is Davidic; as son of Abraham, he is related to Isaac—the child of the covenant—and to Ishmael—the child of promise—both of whom Abraham fathered.

As a descendant of David, Jesus inherits the Davidic covenant and thus enjoys a unique relationship with God the Father, along with many blessings. Four women are either non-Israelites or associated with non-Israelites; Mary is the exception. Several women in this genealogy had sordid backgrounds: Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho. Bathsheba, who is not named but is referred to as the wife of Uriah, committed adultery with David, became pregnant, and gave birth to Solomon. Ruth was a Moabite

woman and David's grandmother (Solomon's great-grandmother). Tamar came to Judah's aid by posing as a prostitute (Genesis 38). Many corrupt kings are mentioned, including Ahaz and Manasseh. Thus, this genealogy depicts a profile of Jesus' identity, ancestral history, and mission. His human life is clearly rooted in the human condition.

The genealogy of Jesus presented in today's Gospel situates him in the history of the descendants of Abraham. Like our own ancestral background, it does not completely consist of stellar examples of heroes and heroines. Yet from this long line of imperfect human beings came the Savior of the world!

Undoubtedly, some of the Sisters of Francis of the Martyr St. George in your 100-year history in this country were holier than others. By acknowledging both the strengths and weaknesses of our heritage, we become capable of living our own lives to reflect what we have learned from our spiritual ancestors, seeking to avoid repeating their mistakes while striving to build on their successes.

In gratitude for those who have gone before us, we ask the Holy Spirit, to shape our humanity into godliness, as we now receive the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ into our hearts in this Eucharist.

May God give us this grace. Amen.