

**Homily for Mass Celebrating the 150th Anniversary of
HSHS Saint Anthony's Memorial Hospital
Effingham, Illinois**

April 30, 2025

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good to be with you to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of Saint Anthony's Memorial Hospital here in Effingham, Illinois.

In November 1875, twenty Sisters of the Hospital Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis left Muenster, Germany, at the invitation of Bishop Peter Baltes of Alton, Illinois, landed in New York, and then arrived in Alton, Illinois, on November 6, 1875. These first Sisters were organized into small groups and brought health care services to the people of Alton, Belleville, Effingham, East St. Louis, Litchfield, and Springfield – all in Illinois – and these cities were chosen because there were German immigrants and because the cities had access to the railroad. The Motherhouse would be in Springfield. Three of these sisters arrived in Effingham on the November 15, 1875, namely, Sister Euphemia Gaertner (Superior), Sister Fortunata Honkamp, and Sister Francis Dreisvogt.

The three Sisters were greeted by the pastor and people of St. Anthony's Parish. The Sisters were soon going about the area serving the poor and the sick and all were welcomed by the Sisters, regardless of religion or the ability to pay. Doctors recognized that the Sisters' care was professional, as well as generous and concerned. Six acres of land were donated by Michael Moenning for a hospital, and in August 1876, the cornerstone of the new building was laid. The building cost \$7,000. The Sisters took possession the following year. The hospital was named St. Anthony's Hospital after the parish that had so generously welcomed them to Effingham.

In 1891, because of the crowded conditions, an addition was constructed at a cost of \$7,300, which gave the hospital the necessary accommodations for the Sisters and the patients. At that time there were ten Sisters serving the hospital with Sister Wilhelmina as the Superior.

The title to the hospital was originally made out to the Diocese of Alton in order to secure the property for the Sisters. In 1893 Bishop James Ryan deeded the property to the Sisters.

As we know, tragedy struck on April 4, 1949, as a fire broke out at the hospital claiming the lives of 77 patients, employees, and Sisters. But the Effingham community immediately came together to raise funds and plan to rebuild the hospital, with help from the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis and donations from people across the nation and the world. May 15, 1954, marked the dedication of St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital, adding "Memorial" to the name in honor of those who died in the fire five years earlier.

As the current Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, I express my gratitude as well as the appreciation of my predecessors and all the people of central Illinois who have benefited from the health care ministry founded by the Hospital Sisters of Saint Francis as well as many lay people in the healthcare professions. In this Mass, we give thanks to Almighty God for all the blessings bestowed on Saint Anthony's Memorial Hospital during the past century and a half, and we pray for continued blessings on this healthcare ministry for many more years to come.

This year also marks another significant anniversary, namely, the seventeenth centenary of the Council of Nicaea, which is the basis of the Creed we still use today. Every Sunday after the homily at Mass, along with

Catholics all over the world, we recite the Profession of Faith, known as the Nicene Creed. Just imagine, seventeen centuries during which, using these same words, billions of Christians have expressed their belief in God as the One who loves, the One who is beloved, and the One who is the Love between them. During that gathering in Nicaea, in the year 325, well before our lands were evangelized, the Council delegates came to a unified statement of who Jesus Christ is. We are the heirs of those who gathered so long ago, and we too believe in the mystery of God's continuing presence in our world, and in our call to live in that mystery while being Christ's hands and feet in our concrete service and generous love for suffering humanity.

When we say the words of the Creed, we are committing ourselves to beliefs that have practical, real-life implications. For example, when we say: "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Begotten son of God... through Him all things were made," we are expressing our belief in Christ's identity as true God and true man. But we are also expressing our understanding of our own identity as human beings created in God's image and disciples of Christ. In fact, when we say, "through Him all things were made," we acknowledge that every part of God's creation is graced and full of dignity.

In the last line of the Nicene Creed we profess, “I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.” The phrase “resurrection of the dead” refers here not to Jesus, but to all of us. Jesus tells His disciples very clearly that “the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28-29). Our celebration today takes place during this Easter season as we continue to rejoice in Our Lord’s resurrection by which we are given the joyful hope of being raised up to eternal life and everlasting happiness in the Kingdom of Heaven.

United States history is filled with stories of pioneers, bold men and women who made their way across what was for them a new world, to make a home for themselves. The word *pioneer* brings out a dimension of adventure and danger.

It may be said that Jesus was a pioneer, breaking new ground, “pioneering” the kingdom of God. He dared to teach with authority. He risked disapproval by the people and their leaders. Many reacted positively. We know that many did not, and demanded His crucifixion.

With His death on the cross, Jesus would seem to have lost the fight. But He would be “made perfect through suffering” by dying and then rising from the dead on the third day. We should never forget the cost Jesus paid as the pioneer of our salvation – for a little while “lower than the angels . . . bringing many children to glory.”

Today we honor the pioneers who founded St. Anthony’s Memorial Hospital 150 years ago. In our Eucharist today, we thank the Lord for leading us to salvation and for those who carry on His healing mission in our world today.

May God give us this grace. Amen.