

**Homily for Parish Pastoral Visit Mass at  
Little Flower Church, Springfield, Illinois (Saturday, 4:30 PM)**

**Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C**

**February 8, 2025**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As your Bishop, it is good to be with you for my Pastoral Visit to Little Flower Parish here in Springfield. In addition to celebrating Mass, I will meet this evening with your parish councils to hear about all the good things that are happening here at your parish to implement our Fourth Diocesan Synod. My visit today is also an opportunity to share with you my hopes and my vision as your bishop for the future of our diocese, building on and implementing our Diocesan Synod held in 2017 on the theme of discipleship and stewardship.

Following our Diocesan Synod, I published my third pastoral letter, *Ars vivendi et moriendi in Dei gratia*, Latin for, "The Art of Living and Dying in God's Grace," I provided a summary of the Fourth Diocesan Synod and some pastoral commentary on the twelve declarations that were adopted. I also offered some theological reflections on the art of living and dying in God's grace.

In this pastoral letter, I said that the “art of living and dying in God’s grace is the key to everlasting happiness in eternal life. The Christian faithful die to sin through the saving waters of baptism. By dying to their selfish desires through acts of mortification and self-sacrifice, the Christian faithful grow in love of God and neighbor. The whole Christian life aims at reaching this goal of everlasting happiness in eternal life by turning from sin and growing in virtue through God’s grace.”

As an expression of how to reach this goal of everlasting happiness, we adopted a new mission statement at our Fourth Diocesan Synod for all of us as members of this Diocese. It says, “The mission of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is to build a fervent community of intentional and dedicated missionary disciples of the Risen Lord and steadfast stewards of God’s creation who seek to become saints. Accordingly, the community of Catholic faithful in this diocese is committed to the discipleship and stewardship way of life as commanded by Christ Our Savior and as revealed by Sacred Scripture and Tradition.”

To further this mission, the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is committed to implementing the Four Pillars of Discipleship and Stewardship, namely, hospitality, prayer, formation and service. In other words, we will invite people proactively to join us in prayer, especially

Sunday Mass; we will provide well-prepared celebrations of the sacraments and other occasions for prayer as signs of hope and paths of grace to heaven; we will study the Bible and learn more about Jesus and our Catholic faith; and we will serve each other, especially those in need, by practicing charity and justice.

Through prayer, discernment, and consultation with others, it has become evident that the Lord is inviting us to embrace more fully our call to discipleship out of which necessarily follows a life of stewardship.<sup>1</sup>

My brothers and sisters in Christ: This year the Catholic Church is celebrating the Ordinary Jubilee Year of 2025. A Jubilee Year is a significant moment in the life of the Church in which she celebrates the year of messianic favor inaugurated by Christ through his Incarnation and Paschal Mystery.<sup>2</sup> Proclaimed every twenty-five years since the thirteenth century, the celebration of jubilee years typically includes pilgrimages, processions, celebrations of Mass, and an invitation to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These liturgical celebrations are opportunities to receive the Lord's mercy, especially through the practice of the Jubilee indulgence, and lead to the performance of works of mercy.

The theme for this Jubilee Year is "Pilgrims of Hope." The title given by Pope Francis to his document declaring the Jubilee Year of 2025 is *Spes*

*non confundit*, Latin for “Hope does not disappoint,” taken from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans (*Rom 5:5*), in which Saint Paul offered these words of encouragement to the Christian community of Rome. Similarly, Pope Francis wrote, “Hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross . . . By his perennial presence in the life of the pilgrim Church, the Holy Spirit illumines all believers with the light of hope. He keeps that light burning, like an ever-burning lamp, to sustain and invigorate our lives. Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God’s love.”<sup>3</sup>

Indulgences are an important aspect of a Jubilee Year. In the *Decree on the Granting of the Indulgence During the Ordinary Jubilee Year of 2025*, the Apostolic See decreed that, “All the faithful, who are truly repentant and free from any affection for sin, who are moved by a spirit of charity and who, during the Holy Year, purified through the Sacrament of Penance and refreshed by Holy Communion, pray for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff, will be able to obtain from the treasury of the Church a plenary indulgence, with remission and forgiveness of all their sins, which can be applied [for] the souls in Purgatory . . . if they undertake a pious pilgrimage to any sacred Jubilee site: by devoutly participating in

Holy Mass," the Way of the Cross, recitation of the Rosary, or participating in a penitential celebration, which ends with the individual confessions of the penitents, as established in the Rite of Penance (form II). In our Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, the designated sacred Jubilee site is our Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

There are also ways to gain the Jubilee Indulgence for those who are not able to make a visit to our Cathedral in person. "The faithful who are truly repentant of sin but who cannot participate in the various solemn celebrations, pilgrimages and pious visits for serious reasons (especially cloistered nuns and monks, but also the elderly, the sick, prisoners, and those who, through their work in hospitals or other care facilities, provide continuous service to the sick), can obtain the Jubilee Indulgence, under the same conditions if, united in spirit with the faithful taking part in person, (especially when the words of the Supreme Pontiff or the diocesan Bishop are transmitted through the various means of communication), they recite the Our Father, the Profession of Faith in any approved form, and other prayers in conformity with the objectives of the Holy Year, in their homes or wherever they are confined (e.g. in the chapel of the monastery, hospital, nursing home, prison...) offering up their sufferings or the hardships of their lives;

“In addition, the faithful will be able to obtain the Jubilee Indulgence if, with a devout spirit, they participate in popular missions, spiritual exercises, or formation activities on the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, held in a church or other suitable place, according to the mind of the Holy Father.”<sup>4</sup>

During this Jubilee Year 2025,, we also celebrate the 1,700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which promulgated the Nicene Creed that we still use today and recite right after the homily at Mass on Sundays and Holydays of Obligation. 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, 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.

Today’s scripture readings offer us the call stories of three different followers of God: the prophet Isaiah and the apostles Paul and Peter. Each

of them has a sense of unworthiness, but God does not call us to discipleship because we are worthy. He calls us precisely because we are sinners. God's grace is not a reward for our virtue but an opportunity for divine strength to shine through our weakness.

In each of the call stories that we hear in today's readings, the person called feels that God has in some sense got it wrong — none of them initially feels like the sort of person whom God should choose. But God's criteria for calling disciples are not ours. At a time of major threat to Israel Isaiah feels inadequate to the task of prophesying God's will, yet his are the prophecies we still hear today, promising the advent of God's saving power, a great light to those walking in darkness. Paul, the former persecutor, gives us some of our most insightful scriptural passages, proclaiming God's folly as wiser than human wisdom, God's weakness as stronger than human strength. Peter's bluster hides his fear and weakness of faith, but when he recovers from his denial of Jesus, he becomes the rock who strengthens the whole Church.

Whatever our own sense of inadequacy and weakness of faith or moral fiber, God sees the best in us. God offers us all the grace we need to understand that we are missionary disciples in this world; all we need is to have the confidence and courage to accept this truth.

I concluded my third pastoral letter by telling a personal anecdote, which I would like to share with you now to close this homily.

Once when I was catching a flight to concelebrate an out-of-town wedding for a friend of mine, I had gift-wrapped a figurine of the Blessed Mother as a wedding present for the newlyweds and put the gift in my carry-on bag. When I got to the airport and put my bag on the conveyer belt for security screening, the TSA agent looked at the x-ray of my bag and called out, "Bag check." I immediately realized the problem: the figurine was made of leaded crystal and the security agent must have thought it was some sort of weapon. The TSA supervisor came over, saw me standing there wearing my clerical suit and Roman collar, then looked at the x-ray image of the figurine and exclaimed, "For heaven's sake, it's the Blessed Mother, let him through!" Of course, I was greatly relieved. While this incident makes us laugh, it is a true story, and the words of the TSA supervisor are an exact quote.

Reflecting on it, I have often thought that this little vignette is exactly the scenario I hope for when I die: I pray that I will arrive at the gates of heaven with the Blessed Mother at my side. Seeing me standing there with Our Lady beside me, Saint Peter will exclaim, "For heaven's sake, he's with the Blessed Mother, let him through!"

Staying close to our Blessed Mother throughout life provides faithful assurance that she will lead us to her Son Jesus at the hour of our death, so that we may die in God's grace and enjoy everlasting happiness in eternal life.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, 1992, p. 8; <http://www.usccb.org/upload/stewardship-disciples-response-10th-anniversary.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> (Cf. Lk 4:19; John Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, nos. 11- 16).

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Spes non confundit*, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025, given in Rome on May 9, 2024, par. 3; accessed online December 23, 2024, at: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/20240509\\_spes-non-confundit\\_bolla-giubileo2025.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/20240509_spes-non-confundit_bolla-giubileo2025.html).

<sup>4</sup> Apostolic Penitentiary, *Decree on the Granting of the Indulgence During the Ordinary Jubilee Year of 2025*, given May 13, 2024; accessed online December 28, 2024, at: [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/tribunals/apost\\_penit/documents/rc\\_penitenzieria-ap\\_20240513\\_norme-indulgenza-giubileo2025\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/tribunals/apost_penit/documents/rc_penitenzieria-ap_20240513_norme-indulgenza-giubileo2025_en.html).