

**Homily for Mass Celebrating the 150th Anniversary of
HSHS Saint John's Hospital, Springfield**

**Chapel of HSHS Saint John's Hospital
Springfield, Illinois**

January 14, 2025

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

On July 2, 1844, a Franciscan priest, Father Christopher Bernsmeyer, witnessed the religious commitment of women in Our Lady of Grace Chapel in Telgte, a village outside the city of Muenster, Westphalia, Germany. This marked the foundation of the Hospital Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, a religious community dedicated to the service of the sick and those in need.

The Community grew rapidly and in the early years provided assistance to the sick in Westphalia and Silesia. The Sisters were quick to respond to health crises whenever they were called. Accepting the invitation of Bishop Peter Joseph Baltes of Alton, Illinois, 20 Sisters arrived in the United States on November 3, 1875. They established their Motherhouse in Springfield, Illinois, and began their ministry by nursing the sick and poor in their homes.

Amazingly, the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis founded four hospitals in Illinois within days of each other in that same year: St. John's Hospital was founded in Springfield on November 11, 1875; St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Belleville was founded on November 13, 1875; St. Francis Hospital in Litchfield was founded on November 13, 1875; and St. Anthony's Hospital in Effingham was founded on November 15, 1875.

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.

Our first reading from the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 2:5–12) tells us that Jesus is more than a mere angel. He is “for whom and through whom all things exist,” or as we say in the Nicene Creed, “through whom all things were made.”

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. Some translators of today’s selection from Hebrews describe Jesus as “the pioneer of salvation.” The Greek word has been translated as “prince, author, leader, chief, or captain.” But *pioneer* brings out a dimension of adventure and danger well illustrated in today’s Gospel (Mark 1:21-28).

Jesus entered the synagogue at Capernaum and dared to teach with authority. He risked disapproval by the congregation and its leaders. The crowd reacted positively. We know that the leaders did not. Then Jesus took on an unclean spirit, a formidable foe. Jesus drove the spirit out of a man. Violent convulsions made clear that Jesus had won an epic battle.

Jesus was breaking new ground, “pioneering” the kingdom of God. The unclean spirit knew who Jesus was, but the crowd was simply amazed. It would take some time for them to understand what they were seeing. They knew Jesus as one of their fellow townsfolk, but they hardly expected such surprises from him. The Letter to Hebrews tells us that Jesus’ battle with daunting foes continued. Jesus would later seem to lose the fight. 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. John’s 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.