

Homily for the Mass of Christian Bural for Roseann Marie (Paprocki) Gray

**St. Joan of Arc Church, Lisle, Illinois
January 2, 2025**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

A few years ago, I concelebrated the Mass of Christian Burial for the Bishop of another diocese. Since the Bishop knew he was dying, he left instructions for the priest he had asked to give the homily at his funeral. The Bishop wanted to make it clear to the priest that the homily should not be a canonization of him as a saint, since only the Pope has the authority to canonize a saint, but also because the Bishop said although he was pretty sure he would not be going to hell, there was a good chance he would still be in purgatory, and that is why we needed to pray for him!

Aunt Roseann did not leave any instructions for me regarding her funeral homily, and although I cannot canonize her as a saint, I can highlight aspects of her life that give praise and glory to God and reflect God's image, since, as we read in the book of Genesis, we are all made in the image and likeness of God (*Genesis 1:26-27*).

Roseann Marie Paprocki was born in Chicago on August 29, 1928, the youngest child of John H. Paprocki, Sr. and Mary (Gorski) Paprocki. Her brother, John H. Paprocki, Jr., was my father, and her other siblings were another brother, Joseph, and two sisters, Marian and Genevieve. Their spouses were, respectively, Veronica, Lillian, Bruno Jacobs, and Joseph Conrad. When the five Paprocki siblings would get together with their respective five spouses, we would call them the "Big Ten." The ten of them were indeed, in many respects, larger than life, giving me and my siblings and cousins beautiful examples of family life and living the Catholic faith. Aunt Roseann was the last of the Big Ten, and so her passing marks the end of a generational era.

Aunt Roseann was married to Edwin Gray for 51 years until his death in the year 2000. They had six children: David, Gail, Gary, Michael, Mary, and Karen. She was grandmother of 14 and great-grandmother of 11, as well as aunt, great-aunt, great-great aunt, a fond cousin and beloved friend of many. Normally I extend condolences to family members and loved ones, but since I am a family member myself, I would say that I share in your sense of loss, but also find consolation in Christ's promise of eternal life.

I asked our family members if they had any stories or memories that exemplified Aunt Roseann's Christian faith and family values. The picture that emerged was that of a genuinely happy, soft-spoken person, whose listening skills outweighed her speaking skills because of the genuine interest she displayed when interacting with others. She consistently provided people in her life with a warm smile. She attended mass regularly, until she stopped driving. Even when she did not physically go to church, she would watch Sunday mass on TV.

Not surprisingly, Easter was also mentioned as a special and memorable time, coloring Easter eggs and loading up multiple large baskets to bring to St. Simeon Parish in Bellwood in a wagon in keeping with the Polish custom of blessing the Easter food baskets on Saturday morning before Easter Sunday. For Easter Sunday, Uncle Ed would always purchase orchid corsages for all the girls, including Aunt Roseann, and they would have new hats/bonnets, dresses and shoes for Easter Sunday Mass.

There was not one single instance or example of Aunt Roseann and Uncle Ed instilling family values because there are simply too many. Their love and examples are threaded in many memories. Aunt Roseann and Uncle Ed made very clear to their children the importance of family and

spending time together. Summertime, especially the Fourth of July, often saw the Paprocki's – all nine of us children with Mom and Dad – visiting the Grays in Bellwood and then Lisle – all six of their children with Aunt Roseann and Uncle Ed. Wintertime usually meant the Grays coming to be with the Paprocki's in Chicago for Thanksgiving, Christmas and/or New Year's Day. Of course, all of us children were not about to stay confined to the living room of their house in Bellwood or our crowded apartment in Chicago, so it would not be long after eating endless snacks and finishing a delicious homemade meal while seated at three separate tables that we would soon be playing hockey in the basement or baseball in the driveway, backyard or anywhere we could, then blasting rock and roll music, drinking pop and Kool Aid – all the while without ever a hint of displeasure on Aunt Roseann's face or a sound of irritation in her voice, just always that beautiful calm welcoming smile and laughter that made us never want to leave.

One of our cousins remembers as a child going with her family to Chicago for Christmas and for many years the big family Christmas dinner was at Aunt Roseann and Uncle Ed's first little home with about 40 or more people. Somehow they made enough room for everyone and all had a great time!

Aunt Roseann also had a great sense of humor. One of our family members shared the story of how Aunt Roseann knew he loved coconut and hated sauerkraut. One Year she made him a supposed “coconut” birthday cake and told him to keep eating, when he noticed a sour taste, only to find out she made him a “chocolate covered sauerkraut” birthday cake! Aunt Roseann also knew he loved “sponge” cake and so one year she made him a “sponge” cake for his birthday. As you might already be guessing, yes, she bought sponges from a store, glued or taped them together, and frosted them with chocolate icing. Of course, she had a roaring laugh when he could not cut the “sponge cake” after trying to cut it multiple times with sharp knives!

All of this can be summed up in one word: hospitality. There is a Polish proverb that we had hanging in a picture frame over one of the doorways in our house. It said, *Gość w dom, Bóg w dom*, which means, “A guest in the house is God in the house.” Aunt Roseann exemplified this virtue of hospitality, and made all of the guests of her home feel special. Several family members expressed how appreciative and thankful they are for being a part of this family, how much it means to them and how it has shaped their lives. *Eucharist* comes from a Greek word that means “thanks,” so we give thanks to God in this Eucharist for the life of Aunt Roseann.

Aunt Roseann typically was not very excitable. However during her rehab after hip replacement surgery, she understandably displayed a lot of anxiety and would repeat certain phrases over and over again. The only prescription that worked in calming her down was to pray, and she had no hesitation joining family members in saying Our Father's, Hail Mary's and Glory Be's. Her faith was a constant source of strength for her despite her deteriorating condition.

I happened to be in Chicago when I learned that Aunt Roseann had entered hospice care at Edward Hospital in Naperville. When I visited her there on December 20th, I administered the last rites of the Catholic Church to her, including the Sacrament of Anointing and the Apostolic Pardon of all her sins, and she was able to receive and swallow a small piece of Holy Communion. When Holy Communion is given to a dying person, it is called *Viaticum*, which means, "food for the journey." It was indeed heavenly food for her final journey, as she died four days later on Christmas Eve. Apparently she decided, "Enough hanging around here with all of you. I want to celebrate Christ's birthday with him!"

Yesterday began a new calendar year. It also happens to be a Jubilee Year in the Catholic Church. 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.¹ 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.

Although Pope Francis proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee for the Year of Mercy in 2015, the last Ordinary Jubilee Year took place in 2000, when Pope John Paul II led the Christian faithful across the threshold of two millennia from the birth of Jesus Christ.

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."²

The Holy Father connects the virtue of hope and our Blessed Mother, saying, "Hope finds its supreme witness in *the Mother of God*. In the Blessed Virgin, we see that hope is not naive optimism but a gift of grace amid the realities of life. ... [that] the Mother of God comes to our aid, sustains us and encourages us to persevere in hope and trust."³

Our Scripture readings that we heard this morning reflect this theme of hope for salvation and eternal life. In the Old Testament reading from the Book of Wisdom, we are assured that the "souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them . . . Because grace and mercy are with His holy ones" (*Wisdom 3:1-9*). In our Responsorial Psalm, we sang, "All the ends of the earth have seen the saving power of God" (*Psalms 98:3*).

In the New Testament reading, we heard the passage from Saint Paul that Pope Francis selected as the theme for this Jubilee year, where Saint Paul wrote that "Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been

poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”
(*Romans 5:5-11*).

Finally, in the Gospel, Jesus tells His disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father’s House, there are many dwelling places.” When the Apostle Thomas asks how we can know the way to His Father’s house, Jesus says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (*John 14:1-6*).

My brothers and sisters in Christ: Aunt Roseann believed that the way to heaven is through Jesus, the way and the truth and the life. We are a holy family drawn together through Christ in the Eucharist. With hearts strengthened by hope in God’s mercy, may we also follow the path to eternal life shown to us through Christ our Lord.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Cf. Lk 4:19; John Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, nos. 11- 16.

² 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.

³ Pope Francis, *Spes non confundit*, par. 24.