

**Homily for the Sixteenth Anniversary of the Rededication of the
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

December 2, 2025

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, Deacons, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good for us to be here for this Mass celebrating the Sixteenth Anniversary of the Rededication of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. It was on this day on December 2, 2009, that this beautiful Cathedral was rededicated following the completion of the extensive renovation project that began the previous year in October of 2008. But it was actually two years before that, in June of 2006, that then-Bishop George Lucas asked his Vicar General, then-Monsignor Carl Kemme, to form a steering committee whose task it would be to propose updates and changes to the Cathedral. The advisory committee formulated four value statements that guided the renewal work:

1. The Cathedral as the mother church of our diocese reflects and models the strong liturgical tradition found throughout the diocese;

2. Our Cathedral communicates a welcoming hospitality that respects the dignity of all people;
3. An active community called to worship, proclaim and serve, especially in causes of justice, is visible in our Cathedral; and
4. The visual history and tradition of the Cathedral connects us to the larger church and conveys a sacramentality that expresses our baptismal call.

I was not present at the Dedication Liturgy on December 2, 2009, as I was still Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago at the time. But just four and a half months later Pope Benedict XVI appointed me as the Ninth Bishop of Springfield in Illinois and it was a tremendous blessing to be able to celebrate my Mass of Installation as Bishop of this Diocese in this beautifully renovated Cathedral.

It is fascinating to see how those four value statements have come to fruition over the past sixteen years even though I was not part of their original formulation. Indeed, the four pillars of discipleship and stewardship adopted at our Fourth Diocesan Synod in 2017—hospitality, prayer, formation, and service—reflect these values even if the wording is not identical.

Since its original dedication on October 14, 1928, the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception has served as the mother church of our diocese with diocesan events such as ordinations and the annual Chrism Mass. The role of the Cathedral in connecting us to the larger community of the Universal Church took on an added dimension in 2021 with the introduction of having parishes from across our diocese come for the celebration of Confirmation and First Holy Communion Masses here in our Cathedral. This has provided many more people with the opportunity to appreciate the grandeur of the mother church of our diocese and experience the sense of connection to Catholics beyond their local parish congregation.

Our first reading today from the Prophet Ezekiel (*Ezekiel 47:1-2,8-9, 12*) speaks of water flowing from the temple. In our Gospel reading from Saint John (*John 2:13-22*), Jesus refers to His Body as the temple that will be raised up in three days, referring to His Resurrection, and it is from Our Lord's raised Body that God's graces flow to us through the Church. In our reading from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (*1 Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17*), we are told, "You are God's building." Therefore, we must take care to build the foundation on Jesus Christ, for we "are the temple of God."

In his a sermon on the building and dedication of God's house within us (*Sermon 336,1,6: PL 38 [edit. 1861]. 1471-1472, 1475*), Saint Augustine said, "We are gathered together to celebrate the dedication of a house of prayer. This is our house of prayer, but we too are a house of God. If we are a house of God, its construction goes on in time so that it may be dedicated at the end of time. The house, in its construction, involves hard work, while its dedication is an occasion for rejoicing.

"What was done when this church was being built is similar to what is done when believers are built up into Christ. When they first come to believe they are like timber and stone taken from woods and mountains. In their instruction, baptism and formation they are, so to speak, shaped, leveled and smoothed by the hands of carpenters and craftsmen.

"But Christians do not make a house of God until they are one in charity. The timber and stone must fit together in an orderly plan, must be joined in perfect harmony, must give each other the support as it were of love, or no one would enter the building. When you see the stones and beams of a building holding together securely, you enter the building with an easy mind; you are not afraid of its falling down in ruins. . . .

“The work we see complete in this building is physical; it should find its spiritual counterpart in your hearts. We see here the finished product of stone and wood; so too your lives should reveal the handiwork of God's grace.”

May God give us this grace. Amen.