

**Homily for Mass with Priests Celebrating the  
Fifteenth Anniversary of the Installation of  
Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki as the  
Ninth Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

**Saint Francis of Assisi Church  
Springfield, Illinois**

**June 23, 2025**

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

My dear priests, brothers in Christ:

It is good to be with you to celebrate my fifteenth anniversary of my Installation as the Ninth Bishop of Springfield in Illinois. Thank you for being here to pray and celebrate with me, giving thanks to Almighty God for the bountiful gifts bestowed through His grace over the past fifteen years.

One of the greatest gifts for which I give thanks are the priests and deacons that I have ordained over the past fifteen years. I am grateful for all of our priests and deacons, including those ordained by my predecessors, but celebrating the Sacrament of Holy Orders is one of the most memorable and enjoyable things that I do as a bishop!

Last week I was in San Diego for the Special Assembly of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The presentations at this Special Assembly were given by Archbishop Michael Miller, Archbishop Emeritus

of Vancouver, Canada. In his concluding talk last Friday, Archbishop Miller spoke of the important duty the bishop has to foster unity, especially with and among the clergy of his diocese. He quoted Pope Saint John Paul II as saying that the promise of obedience is a two-way street. It would appear that it is a one-way movement as the priest or deacon promises respect and obedience to the diocesan bishop and his successors, but the sainted Holy Father pointed out that the gesture that accompanies this promise has the cleric placing his hands in the hands of his bishop. The cleric's hands are folded in a gesture of prayer and supplication, but they are enfolded by the hands of the bishop, signifying that the man about to be ordained a deacon or priest is entrusting his life into the hands of his bishop. I must admit that this is a powerful moment in the Rite of Ordination for me as the bishop, as I am mindful that by this gesture I am accepting a profound responsibility as a spiritual father for the life and ministry for the man I will ordain.

It is no accident that the most moving moments in the Rite of Ordination are the gestures made with the hands. In addition to the enfolded hands accompanying the promise of obedience, there is of course the imposition of hands done in silence, as well as the extension of the bishop's

hands as he prays the Prayer of Ordination, and the anointing of the priest's hands signifying that he is a true *Alter Christus*, Another Anointed One.

In my homily at my Installation Mass fifteen years ago, I referenced a scene that took place in my favorite movie, *A Man for All Seasons*, about my patron saint, Sir Thomas More. The screenplay by Robert Bolt has the following dialogue between More and his daughter Margaret. This scene takes place in the Tower of London, where More has been imprisoned for refusing to swear to the Act of Succession and take the Oath of Supremacy that would establish the King as the Head of the Church in England. Margaret is trying to persuade her father to find some way to compromise so he could be released from prison.

**MORE** You want me to swear to the Act of Succession?

**MARGARET** "God more regards the thoughts of the heart than the words of the mouth." Or so you've always told me.

**MORE** Yes.

**MARGARET** Then say the words of the oath and in your heart think otherwise.

**MORE** What is an oath then but words we say to God?

**MARGARET** That's very neat.

**MORE** Do you mean it isn't true?

**MARGARET** No, it's true.

**MORE** Then it's a poor argument to call it "neat," Meg. When a man takes an oath, Meg, he's holding his own self in his hands. Like water. (*He cups his hands*). And if he opens his fingers *then* - he needn't hope to find himself again.

Margaret then tries another approach, basically accusing her father of the sin of pride by seeking to become a hero by suffering for his faith. She says, "It's not your fault the State's three-quarters bad. Then if you elect to suffer for it, you elect yourself a hero."

More responds, "That's very neat. But look now ... If we lived in a State where virtue was profitable, common sense would make us good, and greed would make us saintly. And we'd live like animals or angels in the happy land that *needs* no heroes. But since in fact we see that avarice, anger, envy, pride, sloth, lust, and stupidity commonly profit far beyond humility, chastity, fortitude, justice and thought, and have to choose, to be human at

all... why then perhaps we *must* stand fast a little – even at the risk of being heroes.

**MARGARET** (*Emotionally*) But in reason! Haven't you done as much as God can reasonably *want*?

**MORE** Well ... Finally... it isn't a matter of reason, it's a matter of love.

So ends their dialogue.

Indeed, in the end, it's not a matter of reason, it's a matter of love. When I was named a bishop by Pope John Paul II in 2003, I chose an Episcopal motto that reflects this truth: *Lex Cordis Caritas*, Latin for, "The Law of the Heart is Love." Yes, I am a student and a practitioner of the law, but a wise lawyer like St. Thomas More helped me to recognize that the law of the heart is love.

Sacred Scripture teaches this clearly. In chapter 31 of the Book of Jeremiah, the prophet tells us that God has written His law on our hearts. In chapter 13 of the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul says that love is the fulfillment of the law. To depict this visually, my coat of arms has two scales of justice to reflect my background in civil law and canon law, but above

them both is the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On the cross, from His heart, He poured out for us His unconditional love and divine mercy.

The Preface for the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which we will celebrate this coming Friday, says: "For raised up high on the Cross, [Christ] gave himself up for us with a wonderful love and poured out blood and water from his pierced side, the wellspring of the Church's Sacraments, so that, won over to the open heart the Savior, all might draw water joyfully from the springs of salvation."

So, as I said fifteen years ago, I see my primary task as bishop is to love you, more precisely, to radiate Christ's love with the help of God's grace throughout the twenty-eight counties of central Illinois that comprise the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. I came to our state capital not as a sort of Catholic lobbyist, but as a shepherd of souls. But for me to radiate Christ's love also means to proclaim His truth, since if we seek to love as He did, then we must do our best to act as He did and do everything we can to make sure that our deeds conform to His divine will to love. Pope Benedict XVI made this connection between love and truth the focus of his encyclical letter, *Caritas in Veritate* ("Charity in Truth").

In my homily for Evening Prayer for the Vigil of my Installation as your bishop in June of 2010, I concluded with some words of praise and thanksgiving for all the wonderful people that have shaped my life over the years and have been instrumental in guiding me to my greatest hero of all, our loving and merciful God. I repeat those words now in which I referenced William Shakespeare's play, *Henry V*, depicted movingly in the 1989 British film directed by Kenneth Branagh, in which he stars in the title role as King Henry V.

In the play as well as in the movie, there is a powerful scene preceding the Battle of Agincourt on St. Crispin's Day, October 25, 1415. In this scene, the English are outnumbered by the French five to one. When King Henry overhears someone wish that some of the unemployed men back in England could have been with them to help them in battle, the King delivers his impassioned address to his troops in what is known as the St. Crispin's Day speech:

*The fewer men, the greater share of honour.*

*God's will, I pray thee, wish not one man more. . . .*

*This day is called the Feast of Crispian:*

*He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,*

*Will stand a-tiptoe when the day is named,  
 And rouse him at the name of Crispian. . . .  
 This story shall the good man teach his son;  
 And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,  
 From this day to the ending of the world,  
 But we in it shall be remember'd;  
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
 For he today that sheds his blood with me  
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
 This day shall gentle his condition:  
 And gentlemen in England now abed  
 Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,  
 And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
 That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day. (IV, iii)*

As we know, roused and inspired by Henry's oratory, the King and his band of brothers go on to victory, despite the overwhelming odds. After the Battle of Agincourt, when it was apparent that the English had been victorious, Henry V proclaimed,

*Come, go we in procession to the village . . .  
 but with this acknowledgment,  
 That God fought for us. . .  
 Do we all holy rites.  
 Let there be sung "Non nobis" and "Te Deum."*

The King was referring to the Latin hymn of praise to God called the "*Te Deum*" and to the opening words of Psalm 115: "*Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo, da Gloriam*" - "Not to us. Lord, not to us, but to your name, give the glory."

May God give us this grace. Amen.