

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

**St. Viator Chapel
Catholic Pastoral Center
Springfield, Illinois**

June 25, 2025

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

My dear brothers and sisters 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. On the actual day of my anniversary last Sunday, I celebrated the ten o'clock Mass Sunday morning at the Cathedral, followed by our *Corpus Christi* procession and a reception in the Cathedral Atrium. On Monday evening, I celebrated Mass with about 75 of our priests at Saint Francis of Assisi Church in Springfield followed by dinner in Bonaventure Hall. While we are still within the octave of my anniversary, I also wanted to have this opportunity to celebrate with you, who are my close collaborators in our Diocesan Curia. 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.

Because my Installation at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Springfield took place on June 22, 2010, the Feast of the English Martyrs, Saints Thomas More and Bishop John Fisher, I asked the priests of the diocese to use both my first name, Thomas, and my middle name, John, at the point in the Eucharistic Prayer during Mass where you pray for your Bishop, in part as a remembrance of my father, who was named John, but also as a way of continuing to implore the intercession of these great saints, Thomas More and John Fisher.

St. Thomas More has been a special patron saint for me. We have both shared the name Thomas, both have been trained and worked as lawyers, and both have held the office of Chancellor. Because St. Thomas More is the patron saint of politicians and lawyers, he is also the patron saint of many civic officials and others who work in our state capital. St. John Fisher provides a noble example of a brave bishop who gave courageous witness to the Catholic faith. I have images of both of them in my chapel at the Cathedral Rectory, and I pray to both of them regularly to help me in ministry.

In September of that same year a few months after my Installation, I celebrated Masses of Welcome in each of deaneries. In my homily at those Masses, I laid out my vision as the Bishop of this diocese. I said:

- I see a local Church where Catholics take their faith seriously, seek to grow in virtue and holiness, go to Mass every Sunday and participate regularly and actively in the sacramental life of the Church and the activities of their parishes; love God with all their heart and mind and soul and love their neighbor as themselves; bear witness to Christ in their daily lives; and promote respect for all human life from conception to natural death.

- I see a diocese where there is an abundance of vocations of young people willing to answer God's call to follow Him and dedicate their lives to carrying out His mission in the world; where there are sufficient priests to staff our parishes and serve their parishioners with virtuous commitment and impeccable integrity; devoted deacons, nuns and religious brothers dedicated to teaching the faith and caring for the sick, the poor, and the dying.

- I see communities where family life is valued, homes with a mother and a father who love their children and whose children love them; parents who educate and form their children and themselves in the Catholic faith.

- In short, I see a glimpse of God's Kingdom already foreshadowed in the life of the Church and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet in the Eucharistic feast.

All of this might sound like Utopia and in many ways it is admittedly idealistic. The fact that goals are lofty does not make them unreachable. Everything that I described is attainable, and we have made significant progress in several of these areas, especially in terms of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, but we still have a way to go to achieve these goals fully. So what stands in our way?

The only real obstacle that prevents this vision from becoming reality in fact is sin. Original sin is our inherited condition not as some sort of communicable disease, but it affects us more like beneficiaries of an estate whose ancestors squandered a fortune. We have to live with the fact that the spiritual treasures of paradise were forfeited by our human ancestors. While Christ's death and resurrection have restored the gifts of heavenly treasures

for us, we also have to recognize that the devil, Satan, is real, and he will do everything in his power to deflect us from our goal, which is eternal life on high with Christ in His kingdom.

This reality should neither frighten us nor lead us to despair, for Christ is more powerful than Satan. Christ indeed has conquered sin and death. I suggested then that it would be good to remember the Prayer to St. Michael, which used to be prayed after every Mass and which we could still pray beneficially for our spiritual well-being:

*Saint Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle;
Be our protection against the wickedness and
Snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou,
O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God,
Thrust into hell Satan and all evil spirits
Who wander about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen."*

In sum, it should be apparent that I was not describing so much a vision of what I was going to do as your bishop, but what we could do together as the Body of Christ.

Shortly after I gave that homily in each of our Deanery Masses, the Chancellor of our Diocese at the time, Mrs. Marlene Mulford, came to my office with a proposal to print up 50,000 cards with the Prayer to Saint Michael printed on one side and an excerpt of my homily printed on the other side and distribute them to all the parishes in our diocese. Although it was a suggestion and was not mandated by me, the Saint Michael Prayer caught on quickly, and almost every parish in our diocese continues to pray this prayer before or after Mass.

When I was named a bishop by Pope John Paul II in 2003, I chose as my Episcopal motto the phrase, *Lex Cordis Caritas*, Latin for, "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.

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").

Over the past fifteen years, I have visited the towns and parishes of central Illinois and have met many of the wonderful people of this diocese. As you have heard on occasions such as my administering the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Holy Communion, it is my custom on such special occasions for me to sing a song in my homily. So I would like to revisit the song I sang to conclude my inaugural homily in Springfield.

This song is by Brian Littrell, who achieved success as the lead singer for the Back Street Boys. Brian Littrell got his start in vocal music as a boy

singing in his church choir. He now writes and performs Christian music, and he has written this song called, "Jesus Loves You." This sums up my whole message as a bishop.

All my life I've heard Him say

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

I dropped down on my knees to pray

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

I asked Him to come into me

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

From Him He gives eternity

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Yes He does

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Say yes He does

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Yes He does ...

For the Bible tells us so

You need to look inside yourself

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

You can't take with you all your wealth

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

He will give to you an inner strength

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

He walked on water but you will sink

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Yes He does

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Say yes He does

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Yes He does ...

For the Bible tells us so

Said He's the One that died for me

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

And that's the reason I believe

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

And He has done the same for you

(Choir: Jesus loves you!)

So watch and see what He can do

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Yes He does

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Say yes He does

(Choir: Jesus loves you)

Yes He does ...

For the Bible tells us ... so

May God give us this grace. Amen.