

**Homily for Mass Celebrating the 150th Anniversary of
HSHS Saint Francis Hospital
Litchfield, Illinois**

October 21, 2025

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

As Bishop of this diocese, it is good to be with you to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of Saint Francis Hospital here in Litchfield, Illinois. Today is the fourth installment of my celebrations with the Hospital Sisters of Saint Francis to celebrate the 150th anniversary of their various hospitals in our diocese. Earlier this year on January 14th, we celebrated the 150th Anniversary of Saint John's Hospital in Springfield. On April 30th, we celebrated the 150th Anniversary of Saint Anthony's Memorial Hospital in Effingham. In the evening of June 24th, we had a special event at the Illini Club in Springfield with the Hospital Sisters of Saint Francis and many Catholic stakeholders from across the Diocese to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Sisters. One thing is for sure: these Sisters know how to party! Of course, they certainly deserve to party and we are happy to join their celebrations in gratitude to them for providing Catholic health care for a century and a half!

Accepting the invitation of Bishop Peter Joseph Baltes of Alton, Illinois, where the seat of our diocese was previously located, twenty Sisters came to the United States and landed in New York on November 3, 1875. They then arrived in Alton, Illinois, on November 6, 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. These cities were chosen because there were German immigrants and because the cities had access to the railroad.

Three Sisters arrived in Litchfield on November 13, 1875: Sisters Fridolina Pieper, Rosa Walzer and Augustina Quartmann. For three months, they lived in the upper story of the John Weigers' home on West Edwards Street. In 1876, the Hospital Sisters purchased a house on the corner of Columbia and Jackson Streets and enlarged it to provide room for a few

patients. This was the first St. Francis Hospital. In 1891, a new Saint Francis Hospital was built on South State Street that could accommodate twenty patients. Additions were completed in 1906, 1912, 1923, and 1931. In 1971, a new hospital north of Union Street was completed for \$6.6 million. This four story building provided for 134 patients with a half-bath in each room and piped-in oxygen, was centrally heated and air conditioned. A surgery center was completed in 2013 and a remodeled emergency department opened in 2020.

As the current Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, I express my gratitude as well as the appreciation of my predecessors and all the people of central Illinois who have benefited from the health care ministry founded by the Hospital Sisters of Saint Francis as well as many lay people in the healthcare professions. In this Mass, we give thanks to Almighty God for all the blessings bestowed on Saint Francis Hospital during the past century and a half, and we pray for continued blessings on this healthcare ministry for many more years to come.

Earlier this month, on October 4th, the Catholic Church throughout the world celebrated the Feast Day of Saint Francis of Assisi, who has inspired countless men and women for over 800 years to emulate his example of

caring for God's creation, especially the poor and those in need. October is observed as Respect Life Month as well as the Month of the Rosary in honor of the mother of Our Savior, so we pray for the intercession of Saint Francis of Assisi and Our Blessed Mother for continued blessings on the healthcare ministry of the Hospital Sisters Health System.

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. 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.

In the last line of the Nicene Creed we profess, "I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen." The phrase "resurrection of the dead" refers here not to Jesus, but to all of us. Jesus tells His disciples very clearly that "the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29).

Our celebration today takes place as we approach the month of November, traditionally dedicated to praying for the dead, in particular the poor souls in purgatory. We pray for the repose of their souls and we are reminded to prepare ourselves for eternal life.

In the Gospel passage that we just heard from Saint Luke (Lk 12:35-38), Jesus' preaching is marked by a definite sense of urgency. He proclaims that God's final and decisive movement in Israel's life is imminent. The reign of God is coming soon. He calls His listeners to respond to God's movement

in their lives with repentance and faith. The note of urgency reflects Jesus' conviction that the people have only a limited time to respond. Jesus calls those to whom He has preached to be like servants who are ready to greet their master upon his return, no matter how late the hour may be. Those who respond with faith are like those servants whom the master finds ready when he comes and knocks.

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. The word *pioneer* brings out a dimension of adventure and danger. Today we honor the pioneers who founded Saint Francis 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.