

**Homily for the Mass Celebrating the Golden Jubilee of Religious Profession of
Sister Mary Johanna Paruch and Sister Mary Anastasia Maher, FSGM
St. Francis Convent – Alton, Illinois
October 25, 2025**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here for this joyful celebration of the Golden Jubilee of Sister Mary Johanna Paruch and Sister Mary Anastasia Maher. Today, we celebrate and recall the five decades of your spousal-love for Christ, and you renew that relationship in the presence of all of your sisters, and the rest of us gathered here for this beautiful occasion. I thank you, above all, for that witness, for your commitment, and for the joy and inspiration it offers all of us as we also seek to follow the Lord. Today's Mass though, is not simply a *reminder* of that commitment, nor is it simply your chance to renew and re-affirm those vows, for it also invites *all* of us to recommit ourselves to the way that Christ has called us to follow after Him.

The celebration of a jubilee is always a special occasion in the life of the Church. Whether it is the commemoration of a diocese, a parish, or an individual who has served in the Church, it is an opportunity to look back with joy on how God has been at work in a wonderful way in His Church.

It is a time to celebrate accomplishments achieved, graces received, and obstacles overcome in carrying out the mission entrusted to us by Jesus.

This year the Catholic Church is celebrating the Ordinary Jubilee Year of 2025. 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 a jubilee year provides opportunities to receive the Lord's mercy, especially through the practice of the Jubilee indulgence, and leads to the performance of works of mercy.

The theme for this Jubilee Year is "Pilgrims of Hope." The title given by the late 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 first reading you have chosen for your Jubilee Mass is from Isaiah, the great Old Testament prophet of *hope*, promising the Israelites the continuing care of the Lord in the midst of all the afflictions and disasters they faced in the Babylonian exile. His words from the Lord, promising blessings to His beloved bride, Israel, remind us today to recognize in our own lives all those concrete moments for which we too can exult in the Lord.

The prophet Isaiah wrote, "He has clothed me with garments of salvation" (Isaiah 61:10).

Every day, my dear sisters, you put on your religious habit, and every day the Lord smiles because that is His chosen means to bring His salvation into your life for those sometimes-long hours to come.

"Like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem" (Isaiah 61:10), continues the prophet.

I suppose, dear sisters, that you did not often recognize the gleaming jewels your heavenly Groom saw you adorned with, yet His vision is far greater, and more merciful, than ours, and just like His own wounds and cross, He knows that the burdens and temptations you have carried through

the years will one day gleam with the glory of His redemption. After we receive Holy Communion at this Mass, I will place a wreath on the head of both of our Golden Jubilarians as I say these words: "May the Lord, at the close of the race of life, crown you, not with a perishable crown, but with the unfading crown of eternal reward."

Returning to our first reading, Isaiah adds these words: "As the earth brings forth its shoots" (Isaiah 61:11).

Jesus gently reminds us that no matter how rocky the soil of our hearts, or apparently barren the ground of our ministry, His grace, sometimes invisibly, still bears fruit through us and in us.

My sisters, you know so well that it is sometimes hard to see God at work in our lives, yet you stand before all of us today as witnesses that the hope you placed in Him 50 years ago will be fulfilled one-hundred fold.

The sophisticated skeptics of our secular society perhaps think it is foolishness to place our hope in God. But as we heard in today's second reading from Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, "God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong," reminding us that "Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:27, 31).

As we heard in the Gospel from Saint John, Jesus says, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The more we remain in that love, the more we will desire to give everything to Him, holding absolutely nothing back so that when we do reach that final moment, there will be nothing which still clings to us that would prevent us from entering into the loving embrace of the Father in Heaven freely and joyfully.

As we continue our celebration of this Mass, we give thanks to God for the many blessings that you, Sister Mary Johanna and Sister Mary Anastasia, have received, and for the blessing that you have been for the Church and this community. In turn, we offer our heartfelt prayers for you, that you will continue to remain in the love of Christ and to press on with greater fervor toward the goal that still awaits you at the end of your journey. May your renewal of vows today be just as joyous and as full of hope as when you first took them 50 years ago!

With our theme of *hope* at this Mass, I think it is fitting that I close with a hymn that expresses our heartfelt hopes for you:

*Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever child-like, no cares can destroy,
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.*

*Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labors, and give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.*

*Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.*

*Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.³*

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 “Lord of All Hopefulness,” traditional Irish melody with lyrics by Jan Struther.