

Homily for the 23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle C

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

September 7, 2025

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

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

Shortly after 8:30 on the morning of August 27, 2025, a deranged shooter opened fire during the Mass for the beginning of the new school year at Annunciation Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Two children, ages 8 and 10, were killed, and 17 people were injured. That was only eleven days ago, but already this terrible tragedy has faded from the national spotlight, perhaps because such shootings have sadly become so frequent that people have become numbed to such news. But that itself is reason enough for this to become a subject of ongoing national attention, asking why this is happening and what can be done to prevent this from happening again.

A natural reaction in fear is to lock the doors, but that is something we should not do at our regularly-scheduled parish Masses. We cannot become a sort of closed club where members only are allowed in. Jesus said, “Go and

make disciples” (Matthew 28:19). We cannot make disciples if we cower in fear and do not open our doors to make inquirers and newcomers welcome.

The Bible tells us that the disciples gathered behind locked doors out of fear after Jesus was crucified. But Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (see John 20:19-21). Jesus brings peace and sends His disciples into the world.

That does not mean that we do nothing. My staff and the priests of our diocese and I have in the past had conversations with the Illinois State Police, United States Secret Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and local law enforcement about what steps we can take to provide safety and security in our churches and schools, and we will continue to explore effective ways to protect our school children and churchgoers from harm.

The doors could be locked at a school Mass where only students and staff are present. But the doors were locked at Annunciation Church for their school Mass. That did not prevent the attacker from shooting through the windows. What we do need as a society is to find more effective ways to deal with people who are mentally disturbed and prevent them from doing harm to others and to themselves, as was the case with the shooter in Minneapolis who committed suicide after killing and injuring innocent people.

Another thing we should not do is to stop praying. Sadly some liberal politicians and media figures have disparaged prayer as a response to this tragedy, such as Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, who said, “Don’t just say this is about thoughts and prayers.”

In response, Bishop Robert Barron, Bishop of Winona-Rochester in Minnesota, said, “Catholics don’t think that prayer magically protects them from all suffering. After all, Jesus prayed fervently from the cross on which he was dying. ... Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God, which strikes me as altogether appropriate precisely at times of great pain.” Bishop Barron also said the massacre should be recognized for what it was: a deliberate act of anti-Catholic violence. FBI Director Kash Patel confirmed that the bureau is investigating the attack as both a possible act of domestic terrorism and a hate crime targeting Catholics.¹

Pope Leo XIV sent a telegram to Archbishop Bernard Hebda of Saint Paul-Minneapolis, in which the Pope expressed his “heartfelt condolences and the assurance of spiritual closeness to all those affected by this terrible tragedy, especially the families now grieving the loss of a child.” The Pope’s telegram commends “the souls of the deceased children to the love of Almighty God” and “prays for the wounded as well as the first responders,

medical personnel and clergy who are caring for them and their loved ones.” As a “pledge of peace, fortitude and consolation in the Lord Jesus,” Pope Leo imparted his Apostolic Blessing upon “the Annunciation Catholic School Community, the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis and the people of the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area.”²

Archbishop Hebda responded by saying, “I am so grateful for the many promises of prayers that have been coming in from the Holy Father, Pope Leo, and from so many from all around the globe, all praying for the families of Annunciation Parish and School and for all who were impacted by this morning’s senseless violence. I beg for the continued prayers of all of the priests and faithful of this Archdiocese, as well for the prayers of all men and women of good will, that the healing that only God can bring will be poured out on all those who were present at this morning’s Mass and particularly for the affected families who are only now beginning to comprehend the trauma they sustained. We lift up the souls of those who lost their lives to our loving God through the intercession of Our Lady, Queen of Peace. My heart is broken as I think about students, teachers, clergy and parishioners and the horror they witnessed in a Church, a place where we should feel safe. ... While we need to commit to working to prevent the

recurrence of such tragedies, we also need to remind ourselves that we have a God of peace and of love, and that it is his love that we will need most as we strive to embrace those who are hurting so deeply.”³

Four days after the now-desecrated church remained closed, Father Dennis Zehren, the Pastor of Annunciation Parish, who was saying the Mass in the church when the shooting occurred, offered Mass the following weekend in the auditorium in the parish school next door. In his homily that Sunday, Father Zehren said, “My good people of Annunciation [Parish], my good people of Minneapolis and beyond, we are in a very low place. We are in a lower place than we could have ever imagined.” Referring to when the first bullet came through the window, and people cried out, ‘Down, down. Get low, stay down, stay down, don’t get up,’” Father Zehren said, “But when we were down there, in that low place, Jesus showed us something. He showed us, ‘I am the Lord even here. I am the one who descended into hell. I am the one who had taken on all the darkness and evil in this world, all the forces of darkness and death and evil.’ Jesus pointed and he said, ‘Can’t you see how weak it is? Can’t you see how desperate it is? Can’t you see that this can never last? Can’t you see that this is not why God created us?’ Then he showed us. He began to show us a light. It’s a new light. The

light of a new day is breaking,” Father Zehren said. “We watch for that light of a new day. ... That light of the world is Jesus Christ. It reminds us, when death and darkness have done their worst, that’s when God says, ‘Now see what I will do.’”⁴

My brothers and sisters in Christ: Let us join our prayers with those of Pope Leo, Archbishop Hebda, Father Zehren, and all the people of Annunciation Parish in Minneapolis, that we may not lose hope in the face of tragedy, that our faith in God’s love may remain strong, and that we may continue to trust that, in the end, God will protect us from the onslaughts of the Evil One, as we sang in today’s Responsorial Psalm, “In every age, O Lord, you have been our refuge” (Psalm 90).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ <https://www.foxnews.com/media/minnesota-bishop-rebukes-dem-mayor-dismissing-prayer-following-deadly-catholic-school-attack>

² <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2025-08/shooting-during-mass-in-minneapolis-usa-two-children-killed.html>

³ <https://www.archspm.org/statement-regarding-deadly-shooting-at-annunciation-church-in-minneapolis/>

⁴ <https://www.osvnews.com/annunciation-pastor-calls-first-parish-mass-after-church-shooting-a-humble-beginning/>