

**Homily for Parish Pastoral Visit Mass at
Saint Lawrence Church
Greenville, Illinois**

Second Sunday of Lent - Year A

February 28 - March 1, 2026

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As your Bishop, it is good to be with you for my Pastoral Visit to Saint Lawrence Church here in Greenville, Illinois.

My Pastoral Visit here this weekend includes celebrating the 5:30 Saturday evening Mass and the eight o'clock and ten o'clock Masses on Sunday morning. I will then meet with your parish councils on Sunday afternoon to hear about all the good things that are happening here at your parishes to implement our Fourth Diocesan Synod. I look forward to meeting and greeting many of you this weekend.

My visit this weekend is also an opportunity to share with you my hopes and my vision as your bishop for the future of our diocese, building on and implementing our Diocesan Synod held in 2017 on the theme of discipleship and stewardship.

Following our Diocesan Synod, I published my third pastoral letter, *Ars vivendi et moriendi in Dei gratia*, Latin for, “The Art of Living and Dying in God’s Grace.” In it, I provided a summary of the Fourth Diocesan Synod and some pastoral commentary on the twelve declarations that were adopted. I also offered some theological reflections on the art of living and dying in God’s grace.

In this pastoral letter, I said that the “art of living and dying in God’s grace is the key to everlasting happiness in eternal life. The Christian faithful die to sin through the saving waters of baptism. By dying to their selfish desires through acts of mortification and self-sacrifice, the Christian faithful grow in love of God and neighbor. The whole Christian life aims at reaching this goal of everlasting happiness in eternal life by turning from sin and growing in virtue through God’s grace.”

As an expression of how to reach this goal of everlasting happiness, we adopted a new mission statement at our Fourth Diocesan Synod for all of us as members of this Diocese. It says, “The mission of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is to build a fervent community of intentional and dedicated missionary disciples of the Risen Lord and steadfast stewards of God’s creation who seek to become saints. Accordingly, the community of Catholic faithful in this diocese is

committed to the discipleship and stewardship way of life as commanded by Christ Our Savior and as revealed by Sacred Scripture and Tradition.”

To further this mission, the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is committed to implementing the Four Pillars of Discipleship and Stewardship, namely, hospitality, prayer, formation and service. In other words, we will invite people proactively to join us in prayer, especially Sunday Mass; we will provide well-prepared celebrations of the sacraments and other occasions for prayer as signs of hope and paths of grace to heaven; we will study the Bible and learn more about Jesus and our Catholic faith; and we will serve each other, especially those in need, by practicing charity and justice.

Through prayer, discernment, and consultation with others, it has become evident that the Lord is inviting us to embrace more fully our call to discipleship out of which necessarily follows a life of stewardship.¹

Our first reading today from the Book of Genesis (12:1–4a) expresses in a few verses what the journey of faith entails, namely, listening to the word of God and making an obedient response. Abram’s journey of faith begins with God challenging him to move beyond his chosen places of security. He must leave his father’s household, his extended family, and even his homeland. In other words, he must step outside the world in

which he has grown comfortable and trust God to guide him to a place where he will grow stronger spiritually. Following God's word will lead to clear advantages. Abram is assured that he will gain a great name by building his life around God, who also promises that Abram will become the father of a nation great for its example for the rest of the world. All the nations of the earth will find blessing in Abram because he will show them the way to the true purpose of life. People who value Abram's spiritual strength will be blessed by God. On the other hand, people who denounce Abram for his faith will not find favor with God. Perhaps this loss of favor will motivate them to reconsider the direction they have taken in life. In the reading's final verse, Abram makes the ideal response to God's challenge: He goes as God directs him.

In our second reading today (2 Timothy 1:8b-10), Paul assures believers about the strength available to them as they endure every hardship for the sake of the Gospel.

The Gospel passage for the second Sunday of Lent (Matthew 17:1-9) is traditionally the story about the transfiguration of Jesus. Today's version is from Saint Matthew's Gospel. The theological purpose of the transfiguration story is to reveal that Jesus is the Son of God. Matthew recalls the life and ministry of Moses and the giving of the law on Mt Sinai.

The transfiguration of Jesus takes place on an unnamed mountain in the presence of Peter, James, and John. Jesus is divinely changed in the midst of brilliant light and white garments. In the midst of Jesus' transfiguration, suddenly Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus, engaged in conversation. We are not given the content of that conversation. However, symbolically, Moses represents the torah (law) while Elijah represents the prophets. Traditionally the fullness of revelation was described as "the law and the prophets." Jesus himself represents the fullness of the law and the prophets, the fullness of divine revelation.

While all this was going on, a bright cloud casts a shadow over them, and from this cloud comes the divine voice saying: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." The disciples are overcome with fear and immediately fall prostrate. Jesus encourages them not to be afraid. He also advises them not to tell anyone about this occurrence until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead. Only then will what they have experienced make sense.

Jesus allows Peter, James and John a glimpse of glory. After the resurrection, the three disciples were able to speak of what they had seen and live accordingly. As Jesus was transfigured on the mountaintop, may our lives be changed this Lent to reflect the likeness of Jesus for all to see.

I concluded my third pastoral letter by telling a personal anecdote, which I would like to share with you now to close this homily.

Once when I was catching a flight to concelebrate an out-of-town wedding for a friend of mine, I had gift-wrapped a figurine of the Blessed Mother as a wedding present for the newlyweds and put the gift in my carry-on bag. When I got to the airport and put my bag on the conveyer belt for security screening, the TSA agent looked at the x-ray of my bag and called out, "Bag check." I immediately realized the problem: the figurine was made of leaded crystal and the security agent must have thought it was some sort of weapon. The TSA supervisor came over, saw me standing there wearing my clerical suit and Roman collar, then looked at the x-ray image of the figurine and exclaimed, "For heaven's sake, it's the Blessed Mother, let him through!" Of course, I was greatly relieved. While this incident makes us laugh, it is a true story, and the words of the TSA supervisor are an exact quote.

Reflecting on it, I have often thought that this little vignette is exactly the scenario I hope for when I die: I pray that I will arrive at the gates of heaven with the Blessed Mother at my side. Seeing me standing there with Our Lady beside me, Saint Peter will exclaim, "For heaven's sake, he's with the Blessed Mother, let him through!"

Staying close to our Blessed Mother throughout life provides faithful assurance that she will lead us to her Son Jesus at the hour of our death, so that we may die in God's grace and enjoy everlasting happiness in eternal life.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, 1992, p. 8; <http://www.usccb.org/upload/stewardship-disciples-response-10th-anniversary.pdf>.