

**Homily for the Chrism Mass
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
March 31, 2026**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, Deacons, Consecrated Religious, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here for the annual celebration of the Chrism Mass for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. During this Holy Week in which we recall the sorrowful events of the Lord's Passion and death, as we gather this evening, our celebration is one of thanksgiving and joy as we come together from every part of our diocese with representation from every state in life. It is a profound reminder of our identity as one Church, gathered as brothers and sisters to worship together at this one altar in the Mother Church for our diocese.

As your bishop, my primary role is to tend this portion of the flock in Central Illinois that has been entrusted to me, but every bishop is also called to have solicitude for the universal Church. As such, I sometimes find myself travelling outside of our diocese for various reasons. When others hear where I am from, they will sometimes ask: "How are things in Springfield?", to which I respond: "It depends. Are you talking about the state or the Church?"

When considering the state, the picture is unfortunately rather bleak. As a case in point, this last October 31, in the dark of the night, the Illinois General Assembly passed Senate Bill 1950, legalizing assisted suicide in our state, a bill that Governor Pritzker signed into law on December 12. In recent years, especially following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* on the federal level, Illinois has increasingly become a “safe-haven” for mothers, both here and from out-of-state, who want to abort their children. Now, Illinois is set to become a place where people can come to end their lives prematurely through assisted suicide.

If we consider how things are going in Illinois as they relate to the Church, the picture is much more hopeful. For example, the number of people in our diocese who will be baptized later this week at the Easter Vigil is larger than ever, a trend which many other dioceses throughout the state and the country are also experiencing. There are two other reasons why the Church in Illinois offers a ray of light in the midst of the darkness of the secular world. The first is the recent election of our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV. As we know, he is the first pope ever to come from the United States, and he hails from our very own state of Illinois. The other reason for hope here in Illinois has to do with another Illinois-

born figure – Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, whose beatification date was set just last week to take place on September 24 of this year in St. Louis.

My dear brother priests, before becoming the pope or even a bishop, both of these men were priests, just like you and me, and we can learn some important lessons from them as we seek to be renewed in our commitment to serving the Church here in our diocese. I would like to focus especially on how they help us to better understand and live the virtue of obedience in our lives as priests.

This past December, Pope Leo issued an Apostolic Letter titled, *A Fidelity that Generates the Future*, to mark the 60th anniversary of two of the decrees from the Second Vatican Council that treat with priestly formation and the life of priests. In that document, he writes:

Every vocation is a gift from the Father, which needs to be faithfully preserved in a dynamic of ongoing conversion. Obedience to one's calling is cultivated each day through listening to the word of God; celebrating the sacraments, especially the Eucharistic Sacrifice; evangelization; closeness to the least among us; and priestly fraternity, all drawing on prayer as the preeminent place for encountering the Lord.¹

In this regard, obedience is not simply just about going wherever the bishop asks you to go. Rather, obedience is a daily discipline of listening to the Lord and to the needs of those whom we are called to serve. The

Holy Father has spoken elsewhere on this virtue about obedience as being rooted in charity. He quotes his spiritual father, St. Augustine:

now obedience is the daughter of charity..., the root is hidden, the fruit is out in the open. I do not trust what is stuck in the soil, unless I can see what's hanging from the branches. You have charity, do you? Show me its fruit. Let me see obedience.²

This is a helpful reminder to us that charity is to be at the heart of everything that we are and do as priests. It is a charity that springs first from our receiving the Lord's love for us, imperfect though we may be at times, and then allowing ourselves to be a bridge of that love of God to the people He has called us to love and serve. Obedience as a fruit of love is what we desire to renew this night.

As we turn to the example of Venerable Fulton Sheen, we not only have his profound and eloquent words to guide us, but we also have his example. After ordination to the priesthood in 1919 for the Diocese of Peoria, Sheen continued his studies, earning a Doctorate in Philosophy from the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium in 1923. A future of teaching was almost certain, but when he returned home to Peoria, his bishop assigned him to be a curate in a poor parish in the city. He gladly took the assignment and threw himself into the pastoral duties. This brief

time in his life was a profound example of his commitment to obedience, a virtue he would continue to exercise wherever the Lord sent him.

One of Sheen's most famous books on the priesthood is titled, *The Priest is Not His Own*. The title itself evokes a reflection on the theme of priestly obedience. Our obedience as priests is always in service to the Church and how she desires for us to serve her. We may have our own preferences, which is not a bad thing, but in the end, we have been ordained to spend ourselves in service, for we know that our priesthood is not our own. We share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ and we follow Him wherever He will lead us, willingly and lovingly.

In that regard, Jesus Himself understood His ministry as an expression of obedience in service to others. Quoting the prophet Isaiah in the Gospel we just heard, He declares: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me*" (Lk 4:18; Is. 61:1). He then explains how His anointing is not to glorify Himself, but rather, it is for the mission to which He had been called: "*to bring glad tidings to the poor...to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord*" (*ibid.*).

From this beginning of His public ministry to His final offering of His life on the Cross, Jesus demonstrated an unwavering obedience to the will of the Father, rooted in love. The words from John's Gospel that we will hear this Thursday evening at the Mass of the Lord's Supper beautifully summarizes Jesus's entire life and ministry: "He loved His own in the world and He loved them to the end" (John 13:1). In this way, He stands as the model *par excellence* for our obedience as priests. On this night, we ask the Lord to renew in our hearts the desire to love our people, and to love them to the end through our listening and obeying all that is asked of us.

While the ministerial priesthood is given a special focus at this Mass, we also acknowledge that, by virtue of the consecration that we all have received through Baptism and Confirmation, we have been made "into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father" (Rev 1:6), as we heard in our Second Reading. Therefore, this virtue of obedience is essential for all of us in living well as a priestly people. In this regard, we can return to that same document referenced earlier by Pope Leo where he reflects on the commonality that exists among all disciples, both those ordained and those who are not. He writes:

even before dedicating himself to guiding the flock, every priest must constantly remember that he himself is a disciple of the Master, just like his brothers and sisters, because “one is always a ‘disciple’ throughout the whole of life, constantly aspiring to configure oneself to Christ.” Only this relationship of obedient following and faithful discipleship can keep the mind and heart on the right path, through the upheavals that life may bring.³

On this night as we celebrate this Chrism Mass, may we all, priests, deacons, consecrated religious, and lay faithful, “sing the goodness of the Lord” (Ps 89:2), rejoicing in the gift of consecration that we have received. May we renew our commitment to listening to and following the Master as His disciples. In this Eucharist which we are about to receive, we pray that the love of Christ will set our hearts on fire so that, like our fellow Illinois natives Pope Leo and Venerable Fulton Sheen, the witness of our lives may bring light and hope to the darkness that surrounds us.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Leo XIV, Apostolic Letter, *A Fidelity that Generates the Future*, December 8, 2025, no. 7.

² St. Augustine, *Sermon 359 B*, 12 (quoted in Pope Leo XIV’s *Address to Four Religious Institutes*, 18 September 2025).

³ Pope Leo XIV, *A Fidelity that Generates the Future*, no. 9.