

**The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King
December 4, 2011**

**Final Mass
Holy Trinity Church
Mt. Olive, Illinois**

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In his recent book *Happiness, God, and Man*, His Eminence Christoph Cardinal Schönborn reflects on Jesus' puzzling statement from the Beatitudes, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). To the question of how they shall be comforted, he answers, in part:

In places where the desolation of ruined churches does not yet prevail, where the church is still a house that welcomes the visitor with a warming fire, where Jesus is still in the tabernacle, the expectation of all our grief, the acceptance of all our tears, in places where the churches are not yet closed, where we can enter into the space that breathes silence and bow before him who mysteriously dwells therein: this can become a moment of intense experience in which someone who is mourning is in fact comforted and our

churches are once again that sublime refuge of the blessedness of tears that have been consoled. Yet in order for that to happen, we must do everything possible to keep them open, so that we can entrust our sufferings to him, Jesus, who is really present there. And what happens is to pour out tears in his presence; to encounter him whose glance so unsettled Peter after he had denied him! The tears of Peter, elicited by the unspeakable acceptance in Jesus' glance – therein lies, does it not, the happiness that Jesus promised!¹

Although we have gathered here this morning in Holy Trinity church for the final Mass to be celebrated in this sacred building, the Cardinal's words ring true for us. So much of your lives are connected in a most intimate way with this building dedicated to the Blessed Trinity where the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar has been reserved in the tabernacle since 1912.

Here, many of you, your children, grandchildren, friends, relatives and neighbors received the gift of new life in the waters of Baptism and were incorporated into the one Body of Christ, the Church. Here you have beheld your God and have seen his salvation (cf. Isaiah 40:11; Luke 3:6); here you confessed your sins, received sacramental absolution and allowed the Lord to heal you and bind up your wounds. Here the Lord

spread his table before you so many times for you to be nourished with his Body and Blood (cf. Psalm 23:2). Here husbands and wives were given to each other in marriage and the sick were anointed. Here your loved ones were commended to the just and merciful hand of God with in expectation of “new heavens and a new earth” as you asked the Lord to gather your loved ones into his arms (II Peter 3:13; cf. Isaiah 40:11).

With so many important, profound and touching memories, it is, I know, hard to let go; the long expectation of this day does not erase the pain that is felt even if this day brings some relief and closure to a lengthy and difficult process.

These past many years, as the demographics of the population of what was then Holy Trinity Parish has changed and as the passage of years has taken its toll on the church building you love so dearly, you have done what you could to maintain the physical structure here and for your good and generous efforts I am grateful.

I also wish to express to you my sincere appreciation for your patience throughout this process these past several years, which has not been without its difficulties and misunderstandings. The merging of parishes - and the closing of a church, in particular - is never easy, yet you

have realized and accepted the necessity of the present situation with grace, respect and Christian faith.

Today, as we ask the Lord to “teach us to judge wisely the things of earth and hold firm to the things of heaven,”² we ask him to bless in a particular way the recently consolidated parish under the heavenly patronage of the great Blessed Pope John Paul II, that supreme pastor who shepherded the Universal Church after the heart of Jesus Christ (cf. Jeremiah 3:15). As the Eucharist in which we will soon share strengthens the unity of the Body of Christ, the Church, so, too, we pray, will it bring unity and peace to this parish, which comprises the two former parishes in Mt. Olive dedicated to the Most Holy Trinity and to the Ascension of Our Lord.

I urge each of you to look always to the example of your new patron, Blessed Pope John Paul II, to learn from him how to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ and so to prepare the way for the return of the Lord who “will make the glory of his voice heard in the joy of your heart[s]” (cf. Isaiah 30:30).³

We often saw the Blessed Pope deep in prayer before the Eucharistic Lord. Daily he prayed in the presence of the King of the Universe, pouring

out his petitions on behalf of the world. He shared all of his emotions with Jesus and in this he is a model for each one of us.

Even as we mourn the loss of the physical structure of Holy Trinity church, we offer humble thanks to God that the Eucharist will still be reserved in Mt. Olive in the Church of the Ascension. There, in the presence of the Eucharist, do not be afraid to pour out your grief and your tears to the Lord. Bow down before him and you will be comforted. Entrust your sufferings to him and he will look upon you with his glance of loving acceptance and you will experience the joy that comes from the peace of his abiding presence.

Words of comfort that speak to the heart characterize the first reading today that we heard from the Book of Isaiah, together with the promise of a new Exodus and the revelation of divine glory. Advent is a time of waiting. We are waiting for one who has come and yet is still to come again. John the Baptist calls us to make a "way of the LORD." In the journey to the Promised Land, the Lord showed his people the way, guiding them with a pillar of cloud and a column of fire.

But God's ways are not our ways and it is therefore not *our* path or way we are to prepare but God's. How can we know the way? By letting our hearts enter into the silence of the wilderness, the silence of God. The book of Wisdom says, "For when peaceful stillness encompassed everything and the night in its swift course was half spent, Your all-powerful word from heaven's royal throne leapt into the doomed land" (18:14-15). The Word of God, Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, was born into this world in the silence of the night, and it is in silence and stillness that we can begin to discover the path to the mystery of the nativity. These days of Advent are given that we may set apart time to listen to the voice of God; and that by listening we may discover Christ anew and follow him.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Christoph Schönborn, *Happiness, God, and Man*. Michael J. Miller, trans. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 62-63.

² *Roman Missal*, Prayer After Communion, The Second Sunday of Advent.

³ *Ibid*, Entrance Antiphon.