

**Homily for the 125th Anniversary of St. Patrick Parish
Girard, Illinois**

**The Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle B
October 27, 2012**

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

Father House, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a joy for me to be with you this evening to celebrate the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of St. Patrick Parish here in Girard. Thank you for your gracious welcome and warm hospitality!

As you know well, the history of your parish has not always been simple or pleasant. From the beginning, you have always been a mission of one parish or another. Over the years you may have felt as though you were being shuffled back and forth as the diocese looked for the best way to ministry to your needs. Despite these difficulties, you have remained close to the Eucharistic Lord because, like the blind Bartimaeus, you also cry out to Jesus, "Master, I want to see" (Mark 10:51).

Throughout the course of our lives, we look to so many different things and people. We look for the beauty of a sunset; for the joy of children playing; a victory on the ice or on the sports field; for a gripping book; for a delicious meal; for a faithful friend. In all that we seek, there is

truly one thing that we seek: happiness. When the eyes of Bartimaeus were opened, he saw his true happiness; he saw Jesus Christ! And in seeing the source of his happiness, he “followed him on the way” (Mark 10:52).

Even as you have remained near the Lord in the Church he established on the Apostle Peter, many of your family and friends, your neighbors and co-workers, have drifted from our full communion. They, too, are seeking after happiness, but they have forgotten that in and through the Sacraments “the Lord has done great things for us” and desires to fill us with his joy (Psalm 126:3).

Sometimes it happens that we, too, forget this reality and the Lord’s abiding presence in the Eucharist. We forget the mercy he longs to bestow upon us in confession. We forget his love that is to be mirrored in Christian marriages. We forget the gifts of the Holy Spirit received in Confirmation that empower us to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, even as Saint Patrick brought the Gospel of salvation to the peoples of Ireland. Even today, the Lord cries out: “I will console them and guide them” (Jeremiah 31:9).

For all of these reasons, our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI has given us this Year of Faith, which providentially coincides with your anniversary.

At the heart of this Year of Faith is the encounter with Jesus Christ, even as Bartimaeus encountered the Lord. Indeed, in his apostolic letter announcing this year, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of “the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed clearly light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ” (*Porta Fidei*, 2). Like Bartimeaus, each of us is called to ask the Lord see clearly, to allow him to remove whatever it is that clouds our vision so that we may look upon him and follow him in humble and joyful love.

To follow the Lord in this way, it is necessary for each of us to live with a spirit of “self-abandonment, in a continuous crescendo, into the hands of a love that seems to grow constantly because it has its origin in God” (*Porta Fidei*, 7). This is what we call discipleship.

The word “disciple” has its roots in the word *disco* – not a genre of music from the 70s, but Latin for “I learn.” The disciple is one who learns from the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. This learning is not from dusty tomes or ancient manuscripts, but from the very person of Jesus Christ, risen and alive today, through an immediate and personal relationship with him and his Church. This relationship does not – indeed, cannot – leave a person as he or she was before. The true disciple is the one who

becomes such a student of the Master that his very life conforms to the life of Christ in all things.

What can we say to reignite the fire of faith in those who have left or drifted from the Church? What is Christ inspiring us to do to proclaim the faith anew to these lost sheep? These questions lie at the heart of the Year of Faith. Of this task, the Holy Father wrote: “To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived, and prayed, and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make his own, especially in the course of this Year” (*Porta Fidei*, 9). To this end, I would like to propose to a three-fold plan to make the most of this Year of Faith and to strengthen St. Patrick Parish so that through the example of your faith, those lost sheep “shall come back rejoicing” (Psalm 126:6).

First, we must be grateful for the faith we have received, for our encounter with the Lord. Families should strive to make their homes places where the family prays together, reads the Scriptures together, and is nourished together at Sunday Mass. Families should strive to allow their faith to influence everything they do, rather than reserving their faith only for an hour or so on Sunday.

Second, we must endeavor to understand all the more clearly the faith we profess. If a friend, family member or co-worker asks us a question about the Catholic faith, can we provide an adequate – and correct – answer? We ought to be able to do so.

Third, we must share our faith, not only with our family and friends, but with our co-workers and everyone we meet. As the Holy Father reminds us, “Confessing with the lips indicates in turn that faith implies public testimony and commitment” (*Porta Fidei*, 10).

This three-fold plan is the way of discipleship and through it we learn to apprentice ourselves to Jesus Christ, as did Saint Patrick, your heavenly patron and intercessor. With him as your guide and model, you must devote yourselves to helping those who do not know – or who have perhaps forgotten – the love that Jesus has for them.

When we think of Saint Patrick, we often think of a great man who converted an entire people. This is certainly true of this holy man, but he did not convert the pagan Irish all at once; he did so one encounter at a time. This is a comfort to each of us because each of us can seek to lead souls to Christ, one person at a time so that their eyes may also be opened in faith. Through faith, the Lord longs to fill our mouths with laughter and

our tongues with rejoicing if only we sincerely cry out to him, “Master, I want to see” (cf. Psalm 126:2)!

Saint Patrick did not recognize his glory in his dedication as a missionary, but in those he led to Jesus Christ. In his *Confession*, his autobiography, he wrote, “Would that you too would strive for greater things and perform more excellent deeds. This will be my glory, because ‘a wise son is the glory of a father.’” In this Year of Faith, in this joyful anniversary year, let each of us seek to be the glory of the Apostle to Ireland by living as apostles to our family and friends, to our neighbors and co-workers, and even to the stranger on the sidewalk.

May God give us this grace. Amen.