

**Homily for the Diocesan Mission Mass
October 30, 2012**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield**

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

Reverend Fathers, consecrated religious, principals, teachers and students, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I am happy to welcome you here to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. It is good for us to gather today to pray for those who serve in the missions and seek to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every part of the world.

Today in our first reading Saint Paul teaches us to “live in love, as Christ loved us” (Ephesians 5:2). Saint Paul described the mutual love between husband and wife to help us understand the love between Christ and His Church. This message is at the heart of the work of the missions. Jesus loved us by giving his life for us. In return, we are called to give our lives for him and for one another, each in different ways. To live in love is a simple instruction for us to give, but it is not an easy instruction to follow.

Saint Paul reminds us that Jesus “handed himself over” to be crucified in order to sanctify the Church” that is, to make her holy (Ephesians 5:25-26). If we follow his way of loving, we should try to help one another grow in holiness by thinking of others first, and ourselves second.

Because we are often tempted to think first of ourselves and second of others, we need reminders to live in love, as Christ loved us. For this reason, we have been praying the Rosary of Our Lady with a particular emphasis on these October days. Though the month of October ends tomorrow, praying the Rosary should not end tomorrow; rather, we should pray the Rosary regularly throughout our lives.

In the gentle repetition of Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glory Be’s, we hear Mary’s words echo in our hearts: “Do whatever he tells you” (John). Hearing her words, we remember also the words of her Son: “Love one another as I have loved you” (John).

The love that we have received from Jesus Christ is a love that we cannot keep to ourselves. We must share this love with others and help them encounter Jesus as well. This call to share our faith is first heard

when we are baptized and it grows within us as we grow older. The call to be missionaries never decreases, it only grows!

Earlier this month the Church began a “Year of Faith,” proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI as a “good opportunity to usher the whole Church into a time of particular reflection and rediscovery of the faith.” In other words, the Year of Faith is an opportunity for Catholics to experience a conversion – to turn back to Jesus and enter into a deeper relationship with him. The “door of faith” is opened at one’s baptism, but during this year Catholics are called to open it again, walk through it and rediscover and renew their relationship with Christ and his Church. We are further called to share that faith with others so that they may also have a loving relationship with the Lord. That is what missionary work is all about.

Sometimes we worry about those who do not go to Church and we are seriously concerned about those who reject faith in God. We wonder what the future holds in store for them. But we should never give up hope for them.

This past summer our region suffered a severe drought. Many crops withered and even our lawns were parched brown. In recent weeks an increase in rain has made our grass green again. So too with our faith. At

times the future of the faith looks barren and bleak, but Jesus reminds us that the kingdom of God is like a small mustard seed that grows into a large shrub where the birds of the air nestle in its branches.

For many years now the children of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois have been great supporters of the Holy Childhood Association, which now is known as the Missionary Childhood Association. I am deeply grateful for your support of the missionary outreach of the Church and it is my fervent hope that, as in years past, you, the children of this Diocese, will continue to support the work of the missions so generously!

As part of this year of faith, Pope Benedict XVI has granted a Plenary Indulgence for the temporal punishment of sins, imparted by the mercy of God to all the faithful who, truly penitent, receive Holy Communion and pray in accordance with the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff when they make a pilgrimage to a cathedral church, and there participate in a sacred celebration of the Holy Mass, as you are doing today, concluding with the recitation of the Our Father, the Profession of Faith in any legitimate form, and invocations to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and who have also taken or will take Sacramental Confession within a few days.

Before you leave today, each of you will receive a special rosary, the World Mission Rosary, with different colored beads representing the parts of the world where the Church continues her missionary efforts: green for the forests and grasslands of Africa; blue for the ocean surrounding the islands of the Pacific; white symbolizing Europe, the seat of the Holy Father, shepherd of the world; red calling to mind the fire of faith that brought missionaries to the Americas and yellow, the morning light of the East, for Asia.

This special rosary was designed by the Venerable Fulton J. Sheen, who was from the town of El Paso, Illinois, not very far from here. When he introduced this rosary, Archbishop Sheen noted that “when the Rosary is completed, one has ... embraced all continents, all people in prayer.” He asked every Catholic, “Won’t you please make a tour of the world on your World Mission Rosary?”

I urge you, dear young people, to take up this rosary in devoted prayer for the people of the world that they and we will always live in love.

May God give us this grace. Amen.