

**Homily for the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion
February 16 and 17, 2013**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield**

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

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, consecrated [men and] women, catechists, godparents and sponsors, dear catechumens and candidates, family and friends, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

While this penitential season is primarily for those seeking to be incorporated into the Body of Christ, into the Church, through the Sacraments of Initiation, the days of Lent afford even those already united with Christ a vital period in which to ask a necessary question: Have I listened to the word of God and obeyed it? (cf. James 1:22-25). Simply put, we call those times when we have heard the word of God and disobeyed or ignored it, "sin." As we acknowledge in the *Confiteor*, we sin both "in what I have done and in what I have failed to do." A refusal to live out the word of God, with whom there "is no such thing as alteration, no shadow of a change," is a refusal to keep the command of the Lord Jesus to "love one another as I love you" (James 1:17; John 15:12).

So it is that we have willingly undertaken the penitential practices of increased prayer, fasting, and alms-giving so that our minds and hearts might be more attuned to the law of the heart, which is love. To be sure, the journey of a sincere examination of conscience and an honest confession of sins is not easy for us to undertake. We would rather make excuses for ourselves and focus instead on our positive attributes and accomplishments, but such is not the purpose of these days.

If we are to undertake this task fruitfully and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, we must do so together, because we are – or soon will be – one in the Body of Christ. As Saint Paul teaches us, “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (I Corinthians 12:26). Indeed, the presence of so many gathered in this Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception for these sacred rites is a clear reminder of what Pope Benedict XVI called to mind on Ash Wednesday. “Each person is aware that he or she does not face the penitential journey alone,” he said, “but together with many brothers and sisters in the Church.”¹

Dear catechumens, you who seek the grace of baptism and a share in the life and love of the Blessed Trinity, and we who have already been

baptized into Christ, set out with you into the spiritual desert in faith, to beg the Lord to “increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). “Faith is this personal adherence – which involves all of our faculties – to the revelation of God’s gratuitous and ‘passionate’ love for us, fully revealed in Jesus Christ.”²

In the quiet of your hearts you have heard the Lord invite you to enter into his friendship. I am grateful for your willingness to open yourselves to his life-changing love. Let your anticipation of the coming Easter spur you on to give yourselves ever more completely to Jesus Christ, holding nothing back from him.

I turn now to you, dear candidates, you who have already been washed clean in the waters of Baptism, who seek to be received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. You seek to do so during an historic moment in the life of the Church. I will soon call you to a deeper and more intentional conversion under the papacy of Pope Benedict XVI; on the holy night of Easter, you will be received into the full communion of the Church under – God willing – the papacy of a new Supreme Pontiff. Let these historic days serve to teach you – as they teach even those of us who are “cradle” Catholics – that the Church is not *our* Church but *God’s* Church,

which remains under our Supreme Pastor, Jesus Christ, even when a Pope resigns from the Office of the Bishop of Rome.

It has been widely pointed out in recent days that a Pope has not resigned from the Chair of Peter since Pope Gregory XII did so five hundred and ninety-eight years ago to put an end to the Western Schism. It has likewise also not escaped everyone's attention that this occurred prior to the Protestant Reformation which gave rise, over the course of the centuries, to the various ecclesial communities from which each of you has come. There is something in this to consider, and the important recognition of Blessed John Henry Newman, who was once an Anglican priest, comes to mind. He once noted, "To be deep in history, is to cease to be Protestant."

I mention his quote not to demean the communities from which you have come; they have some of the means of salvation, but not all of the means of salvation the Lord Jesus has given us. In these ecclesial communities you studied the Sacred Scriptures, you were introduced to Christ Jesus and received the grace of Baptism, and in them you learned to pray. For each of these graces we give thanks to God.

Now the Holy Spirit has led you through these ecclesial communities to the Church the Lord established on the rock of Saint Peter. Your decision to embark on this road was surely not easy and maybe not even planned, but the Word of God has brought you to this moment when you request full communion with the Church so that you may not only hear the Word of God but put it fully into practice. Thank you for your courage and fidelity to what you have heard.

Finally, dear catechists, godparents and sponsors, I turn to you. In this Year of Faith you have shared your faith with those who will be, as it were, your spiritual children. I thank you for your credible witness to the truth. You have come to understand that “there is no action more beneficial – and therefore more charitable – towards one’s neighbor than to break the bread of the word of God, to share with him the Good News of the Gospel, to introduce him to a relationship with God: evangelization is the highest and the most integral promotion of the human person.”³

I urge you to continue to stand with your catechumens – who will soon be numbered among the Elect – and with your candidates. In the days, months, and years to come, they will look to you for sources of both strength and comfort as they strive to stand daily with and for the Lord.

Together, then, my brothers and sisters, let us turn to the Lord in prayer, asking him to help us make the most of these Lenten days. Let us ask to be more faithful to his word, to “the perfect law of freedom,” so that will indeed “be happy in all [we] do” (James 1:25).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, February 13, 2013.

² Pope Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2013, 1.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, Message for Lent, 3.