

**Homily for the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle C  
January 20, 2013**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception  
Springfield**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The little girl had never been to a wedding before, and so was more than excited when her mother promised to take her to the wedding of a friend. When they arrived in church, it wasn't long before she was asking questions. "Mommy," she said, "why is the lady dressed all in white?" "Well," mother explained, "because she's the bride and white is the color of joy; today is the happiest day of her life." The child reflected on the reply for a few moments and then leaned towards her mother again and whispered, "So why is the man dressed all in black?"

We're not told how mother answered that one. But the ceremony in the church, and the people outside awaiting the newly married couple, and the sight of everyone throwing confetti, and all the smiles and laughter: these must have helped the little girl to see that a wedding is a very special occasion and a joyous one - however one is dressed.

The scriptures show that the Lord himself loves weddings. In the Old Testament, we discover not only that he designed marriage but that he was sometimes spoken of as the bridegroom of his people – he the bridegroom, they the bride. In our first reading today we heard Isaiah the prophet daringly yet beautifully proclaiming that the Lord’s love for his people is like the passionate love of a young man for his fiancée: “as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will your God rejoice in you.”

After that it should come as no surprise that Jesus chose a wedding in the little town of Cana as the occasion for his first miracle. John, the Gospel writer, doesn’t use the word “miracle” to describe what happened. Instead he speaks of a sign. It was, he says, “the first of the signs given by Jesus... He let his glory be seen, and his disciples believed in Him.” In other words, Jesus is beginning to reveal who He really is. His transformation of the water in those six huge jugs into delicious wine, “the best wine” of the celebration, wasn’t simply a face-saver for the young couple; it was a sign, a sign that through his coming the ancient bond between God and His people – which had been like life-giving water – was now to be superseded by the exhilarating wine of a new and more intimate relationship between God and the human race.

Jesus did not invent marriage, but He raised Holy Matrimony between the baptized to a Sacrament. The Church also loves marriage, which is we are so concerned about misguided efforts to redefine marriage, an institution of society not invented by Christianity or any other religion, but created by God as part of the natural order for the preservation of the human race.

As the Universal Church celebrates during these days the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, it is unfortunate that some Christian denominations have introduced new divisions by endorsing efforts to abandon the immemorial definition of marriage as a life-long and exclusive union between a man and a woman in a relationship with the potential to bring new life into the world. Certainly, therefore, we offer our prayers to the God the Father, asking that all Christians and, indeed, the entire human family, be gathered into the fold of the one Church established by Christ on the rock of Saint Peter.

In addition to this week's observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, our hearts and minds turn also this week to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the tragic Supreme Court decision, *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized the killing of unborn children through the terrible evil known as

abortion. Since that dreadful day on January 22, 1973, more than 55 million unborn babies have been killed in this nation, founded on the very principle that every person is given by their Creator the inalienable right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

To put that number in some perspective, some 1.5 million Americans have been killed in every war in which this country has fought since 1775. Put another way, the number of children killed by abortion each year in this country is greater than the present populations of the States of Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Tennessee combined. To put it even more starkly, in the same span of time in which more than 55,000,000 children were aborted in our land, just 133,115,440 were born. The number is staggering, and terribly sad.

Today we turn to the Lord and implore him: “Mercifully hear the pleading of your people and bestow your peace on our times.”<sup>1</sup>

This is why my brother Bishops in the United States and I have launched a major pastoral initiative calling for prayer and penance to promote and build a culture of life, marriage and religious liberty. The initiative includes “Nine Days of Prayer, Penance and Pilgrimage” from January 19 to 27, 2013. I invite Catholics in our diocese to join me in this

novena. It includes daily prayer intentions for the healing and conversion of our nation, for elected officials who support abortion, and for all people whose lives have forever been changed by an abortion. The novena is available through social media, text messaging and email, to be helpful for youth and other pilgrims traveling to pro-life events and marches and for those wishing to participate from their parishes and homes.

Let every member of the baptized, all who claim the name of Christian and every person of good will, seek to atone for the evil of abortion and to pray for the conversion of hearts and minds. I urge everyone entrusted to my pastoral care to pray and fast and go on pilgrimage to pro-life events, praying that this Culture of Death will give way to the Culture of Life, so that every person who is conceived will be able to “sing to the LORD a new song” and “bless his name” (Psalm 96:1, 2).

(You can find prayers and suggestions for each of these nine days at [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org) or you can use your cell phone and text 99000 with the message “9days” to receive the prayers each day on your phone.)

Later this week at least nine busses of Catholics old and young from this Diocese of Springfield in Illinois will make their pilgrimage to Washington, D.C. to March for Life. As they march peacefully, they will

bear witness to the love Jesus Christ bears for every person and will “tell his glory among the nations; among all peoples, his wondrous deeds” (Psalm 96:3). Above all, as pilgrims of peace, they will “announce his salvation, day after day” (Psalm 96:2). I ask you to join me in praying for their safety and that their lives will bear witness to the Gospel they proclaim.

Everyone who speaks out against the horror of abortion and seeks to give aid to women in crisis pregnancies is living out this Year of Faith. When he opened this great year with his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, Door of Faith, he reminded us that “faith, precisely because it is a free act, also demands social responsibility for what one believes.”<sup>2</sup> Because we believe in the dignity of every human life from the moment conception to the moment of natural death, we must speak out and call for a greater respect for life in society in general and in our nation’s laws in particular.

Whenever the Church teaches about the dignity of all human life, she does not teach merely her opinion but the truth she has received from Jesus Christ. Because it comes from the Lord, it cannot simply be laid aside. To have faith in Jesus Christ means “choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him.”<sup>3</sup>

Few have stood so closely with the Lord, after his conversion to the truth, as Saint Augustine of Hippo. When he reflected on the Psalm we sang a few moments ago and which I just quoted, he noticed it was one sung at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. He further realized that the new and ever-lasting temple of the Lord is being built of the sons and daughters of the Church. "It is built by singing," he said, "its foundations are [based on] believing, it is erected by hoping, it is completed by loving."<sup>4</sup>

We sing a new song to the Lord because of the wonders he has done for us (cf. Psalm 96:3). Because he has revealed himself through these deeds, we believe in him. Our belief in him gives us hope, even when we surrounded by darkness. The light of his presence fills our hearts with his love and compels us to share that love with others. Whenever we share the love of the Lord we offer hope to others. This hope can lead them to faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in the one Savior of all leads them to "sing to the LORD a new song" and will, we pray, lead them into the fold of his Church (Psalm 96:1).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Roman Missal, Collect for the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time.*

<sup>2</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon 27.1*. In *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament Vol. VIII: Psalms 51-150*. Thomas C. Oden, et. al, eds. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2007), 191.