

**Knights of Columbus Vocations Mass and Banquet  
St. Anthony of Padua Parish, Effingham, Illinois**

**The Twenty-Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year A  
October 12, 2014**

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

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, men and women religious, seminarians, Knights of Columbus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here in Effingham to celebrate this Knights of Columbus Vocations Mass.

In the Gospel for today's Mass, Jesus offers another parable about the Kingdom of God, one of the central themes of His preaching. The parable speaks about how "many are invited, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14) to come to the wedding feast which is the Kingdom. Far from suggesting that God will only choose certain people to share in the reward of being in the Kingdom, this parable is more about the fact that all people are freely invited to the wedding feast, but not everybody chooses to come.

God has what is called a "universal salvific will," where He "wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). At the same time, He has given us the gift of free will, a gift which

enables us to choose freely whether or not we want to spend eternity with Him in that Kingdom. This truth is expressed each time we celebrate the Mass during the consecration of the wine into the Precious Blood, when the priest speaks in the person of Christ saying that His blood has been poured out “for many.” This acknowledges the fact that, even though Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary was sufficient for the salvation of all of humanity, there would be some who would freely reject that offer.

God does not leave us to ourselves, however, in our journey toward the Kingdom. In fact, He reminds us that salvation by our own efforts is impossible (cf. Matthew 19:26). He therefore gives us the help that we need in order to accept His invitation to enter the wedding feast of the Kingdom. This help comes in the form of sanctifying grace which is given to us through the sacraments of the Church. The image of the wedding garment in the parable is understood by St. Gregory the Great to be the supernatural gift of charity which accompanies sanctifying grace.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore necessary that this gift of charity be in our souls in order to enter into Heaven.<sup>2</sup>

In our Responsorial Psalm, we hear the beautiful words of Psalm 23 which speaks of the Lord as the shepherd who will lead His sheep so that

they will “dwell in the house of the Lord” (Psalm 23:6) for all eternity. Jesus Christ fulfills this role as He proclaims that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep, that they might be secure in the sheepfold of the Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> When preparing to leave this earth to return to His Father in Heaven, Jesus entrusted to His Apostles the role of continuing His work of shepherding the people until He returns at the end of time.

This sharing in the saving work of Christ continues today in the shepherds of the Church, the bishops, and in their closest collaborators, the priests. The respect and honor we give to priests is not so much directed to them as individuals, but rather to Christ, the one true shepherd and high priest who loves us so much that He has given us these ministers to enable us to receive the graces needed in order to be saved. It is in thanksgiving to God for that opportunity for salvation from Him and through His Church that we celebrate today.

In a particular way, we give thanks to God for those priests who have served our parishes in the past and who do so currently, many of whom are present with us for this Mass. Their collective ministry has touched thousands of souls, assisting them to follow the Gospel way of life. We are

also grateful to have several of our seminarians present. These young men have responded to a special invitation to consider the possibility that the Lord may be calling them to share in the priestly ministry as well. I know that I speak on behalf of all of the priests and seminarians that we are grateful for your prayers and support as we strive to be generous in giving our lives in service for all of you.

As many of you are aware, there is an important gathering of bishops that is currently taking place in Rome to discuss various challenges that the family faces in our world today. Although they are focusing on another sacrament, namely the Sacrament of Matrimony, there is a very close link to the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Seminarians and priests do not just fall out of the sky, they come from families. Families play a very important role in fostering vocations as they are called to take seriously their responsibility to pass on the faith to their children. A critical part of this is supporting and encouraging their children to be open to God's will in their lives, whatever it may be.

In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI wrote that "the ability to foster vocations is a hallmark of the vitality of a local Church."<sup>4</sup> This is true not only of an entire Diocesan Church, but also of each local parish and indeed each

family which is often referred to as the domestic church.<sup>5</sup> Given that criteria, I would say that the parishes and families of the Effingham Deanery are shining examples of vitality. Nearly half of our seminarians, ten out of twenty-two, come from this deanery. In addition to these seminarians, several of the priests serving in our diocese have come from this area. This is certainly no accident, but rather the result of families, priests, and parishes who have done good work in fostering vocations among the young men of this area. For that, I heartily commend you.

While this deanery can take great pride in this fact, the work needs to continue. You are certainly aware of this, witnessed by the fact that you are holding this event not just to support our priests and seminarians, but to pray also for an increase in vocations, not just in this area, but across our diocese and indeed throughout the Universal Church.

I would be remiss if I did not offer a few words of support and encouragement for the Knights of Columbus in their efforts to work for vocations. From the first days after the Servant of God Father Michael J. McGivney founded the order, you have always been keen supporters of vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life. Every priest and seminarian in our diocese has benefited in some way by your spiritual and

material support. Your dedication to be of service to the Church in this regard is truly inspiring and I am personally grateful for your work. May that work continue to bear fruit for our diocese and our Church as more young men respond to the call to be shepherds after the Heart of Christ.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *In Evan. Homil.* 36.

<sup>2</sup> *Lumen Gentium* §14.

<sup>3</sup> See John 10: 21; *Lumen Gentium* §6.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

<sup>5</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church §1656.