

**Homily for the Courage Conference Mass  
Mundelein Seminary Main Chapel  
Mundelein, Illinois**

**July 31, 2015  
Memorial of Saint Ignatius of Loyola  
Founder of the Society of Jesus**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Your Excellency, Reverend Fathers and Deacons, Consecrated Religious, members of Courage, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is truly good to be with you here, to celebrate this Eucharist in conjunction with the Courage conference. It is personally very good for me to come back to Mundelein seminary, where I studied for the priesthood, and to celebrate Mass here in this sanctuary where I was ordained both a deacon and a priest. So it is good to come back to the roots and the very beginnings of my priesthood and to be renewed in that way.

I am now the bishop of Springfield, Illinois, our state capital, which is about a three and a half hour drive south of here. There are many connections between Springfield and Chicago, [aside from] being in the same province. The diocese of Springfield actually started as the diocese of Quincy, Illinois, right on the Mississippi river in 1853. Just three years later

it was moved to Alton, near St. Louis and it was the Alton diocese until 1923. In 1923, the See was moved from Alton to our capital in Springfield and the bishop who was charged with moving the See to Springfield was Bishop James Griffin who came from the Archdiocese of Chicago. He built a very beautiful Cathedral in Springfield which was designed by the same architect who designed Mundelein Seminary, McCarthy, and so there are many features that are common with the seminary here, which was built in the mid-1920s and our Cathedral which was dedicated in 1928.

As Cardinal, Mundelein's desire was very much expressed in the architecture of showing a very American-type feature, as the Church in the United States was setting its mark, so too our Cathedral in Springfield has a very American flavor to it. Among my favorite characteristics of our Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception are the stained glass windows. The windows on the north wall of our Cathedral of Springfield express the development of Christianity from its very beginnings and on the south wall more specifically about the development of Christianity in the United States.

Bishop Griffin was very aware of Springfield being the capital of the state and described the relationship between Church and State in the windows. So we probably are one of the few Cathedrals, if not the only, that has stained glass windows of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington: George Washington meeting with bishop John Carroll, the first bishop of the United States and Abraham Lincoln meeting with Archbishop John Hughes of New York. But the first three windows we have in Springfield – the ones on the north wall – are the ones that I want to focus on today because they really capture, in those three windows, the essence of what it means to be a Christian.

The very first window depicts Jesus giving the keys to St. Peter. The second window is the martyrdom of St. Ignatius of Antioch. It's a picture of him with lions around him as he was about to be martyred by being devoured by the lions. The third window depicts Pope St. Leo the Great and what is probably very unique is that it is probably the only stained glass window that depicts Attila the Hun! The picture depicts Pope Leo confronting Attila the Hun.

So in these three windows it really captures what it means to be a Christian because first of all, Jesus is giving the keys to Peter. The keys of our salvation are in the Church, founded by Jesus Christ. The second window with the martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch tells us that to be a Christian – all the first Christians were martyrs – to be a good Christian we have to be martyrs and witness to our faith, not necessarily in physically shedding our blood, but certainly in dying to ourselves and our wishes and our desires. And that third window of Leo the Great reminds us that we are called, as Christians, to greatness.

What made Leo the Great so great? He was the first to be called “the Great.” What made him “the Great”? Well that window shows him confronting Attila the Hun; it depicts what made him great. Attila the Hun was about to lead an attack into Rome and Pope Leo goes out to meet him. Not with soldiers, not with an army – it was not a battle. The window depicts a conversation; Leo is standing there, talking to Attila the Hun. I wish I knew what he had said to him, but somehow Leo the Great was able to convince Attila the Hun to turn around and not to invade Rome. When I think about Leo the Great, what made him great was not that he was the Pope at the time of the peak, or the height, of the Roman Empire. He was

not great because of the greatness of the Roman Empire, in fact just the opposite, he was Pope during the 5th century when the Empire was in its decline; it was being invaded by barbarians like Attila the Hun. What made Leo the Great so great was that in the face of all the decline around him in the Roman Empire, he remained steadfast and stood firm for the truth of the faith, giving witness to the truth handed down to us by Jesus Christ. We too, in our times are called to be great as Leo was great.

I've been thinking recently a great deal about the decline and fall of the Roman Empire and how it compares to the age that we are living in right now in the United States, and I don't think it takes a genius to figure out that we are indeed in a decline. I hate to say that. I hate to admit that. We all like to think of the greatness of the United States. I don't know about the fall. I won't predict that. I hope we won't fall but we are definitely in a decline. The 20th century is often referred to as the "American Century" but in reality as we look back it was maybe the American half-century, because our greatness in some ways ended with World War II. The "Greatest Generation" led us to victory in World War II. Within seven years we were unable to win a war in Korea, we were in the 60's and 70's unable to win a war in Vietnam, we were prevailing in Iraq

until the President withdrew all of our forces and now it has been overrun with the Islamic State.

What happened to the Roman Empire? As you read Edwin Gibbons, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," he writes about how, as the Roman Empire weakened, its enemies began to perceive its weakness and so that is when the attacks came in because at its height no one would dare attack Rome because it was suicidal to do that. In its weakness people began to attack Rome. Even from within. What used to be a great source of pride, to say, "I'm a Roman citizen," became almost shameful to say during its declining years.

September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 should have been a wakeup call for our country to act here on our own soil. It should have been a time for us to turn more resolutely and devoutly to God, and yet we see how, unfortunately, many people had the exact opposite reaction. We continue to have attacks on our own soldiers, right here on American soil. And from within we see our country, our Supreme Court, that makes up laws according to its own whim without any relation to the Constitution. We have a President who decides which laws he will or will not enforce, and so for us, as we gather here for this Courage conference, we might be wondering, "why bother?"

So if our society is now embracing same-sex relationships, raising it to the status of a right: people of the same-sex have a right to get married to each other; the Boy Scouts of America have announced that it is their policy now that it is okay to be openly gay and to still be a leader – why are we bothering with this, going against the culture? If everybody else is accepting this, why are we swimming against the tide?

Well the answer to this question is because Jesus said, which we heard in today's Gospel, even that we need to proclaim the wisdom that is foreign to the people. Jesus said, "Do not conform yourself to this age, this depraved generation." You are called to be different, you are called to be great, you are called to be witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Today, in this feast day of St. Ignatius of Loyola we have a wonderful example of how to do that. Ignatius was a very worldly figure, living in the 15th century and the accounts of his spiritual development tell us he was a soldier and he was injured in battle and so it was during his recovery that he was looking for books. Remember books were not as available then as they are today, and so he wanted to read some books about military exploits because he loved reading about that, and all they could find were books of the lives of the saints, and so he spent his time reading that. We're

told in the life of Ignatius, how he reflected upon that, he said when he would read about worldly exploits, like military battles, he would feel intense pleasure, but then after he stopped thinking about that, he would feel dry and depressed. In contrast, when he would read about the life of Christ and the life of the saints, he would have intense joy, and even when he stopped reading and he stopped thinking about those, that joy remained with him, and that leads to what is known today as Ignatian Spirituality. That is a discernment of spirits to discern God's presence and His activity in our lives.

We all know of course that Ignatius then goes on to found the Society of Jesus, established by Pope Paul III in 1540 and the great universities and missionary work carried on by the Jesuits today and even the first Jesuit to become Pope, Pope Francis, carrying on that tradition of St. Ignatius. For us, I think it's very important to reflect on the insight that Ignatius had because as we look at what the world offers us, the world offers intense pleasure, and especially within the realm of sexuality, there's no question: engaging in sexual acts brings great pleasure, but it is not lasting, and people who engage in illicit sexual actions often experience very quickly the guilt, the remorse, the bad feelings that come with engaging in

activities that they know are wrong, and in contrast, when we set our hearts on Jesus Christ and live the way Christ has called us to live, in the great mysteries of the Church – the commandments that He has given to us, the beatitudes – when we meditate on those aspects of our faith, those mysteries, and when we dedicate ourselves to do that, even at the cost of being martyrs, as I said, of dying to ourselves, we experience great joy. And that is what Christ offers us.

Yes, we are called to imitate Him upon the cross, but the Christian life does not end upon the cross. It ends with the resurrection, with the promise of eternal life: eternal happiness in His kingdom. That is what we are called to: a life of happiness and joy forever in His kingdom. In this Eucharist now we are about to receive the greatest gift that Christ could give us. He gives us Himself. We approach this altar to receive the very essence of Love into our hearts, the Love that comes to us in the Sacred Heart.

May God give us this grace. Amen.