

**Mass to conclude the yearlong celebration of the 150th Anniversary of
St. Elizabeth Catholic Parish Granite City, Illinois**

**November 13th, 2021
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
St. Elizabeth Catholic Church
Granite City, Illinois**

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

My dear Father Alfred, parishioners, and friends of St. Elizabeth Parish here in Granite City, it is good to be here with all of you to conclude your yearlong celebrations of the 150th anniversary, the sesquicentennial, of the founding of this parish! Today I recall the delightful occasion almost exactly one year ago when we began this year also here at the Altar of the Lord. Since then, I know you have had many chances to gather and celebrate and grow as a parish, but today we come full circle and once again return to this place to worship and give thanks to God.

Our focus one year ago as we began this sesquicentennial celebration was to look back with gratitude on the humble beginnings of this parish, which laid a strong foundation for the years to come. Today we look hopefully to the indefinite future, seeking to build on what has come before, so that it will last for many more years to come, with the help of God's grace.

Today is the last Sunday of Ordinary Time, with next Sunday – dedicated to Christ as King of the Universe – being the great and final celebration of the Church’s annual pilgrimage through the life of Jesus. If next Sunday is the ultimate destination that the Church reaches each year – Jesus as the King of *everything* – what is this penultimate Sunday meant to be? I cannot help but think it is providential that it is on this concluding day of the Church’s year that we also conclude the celebration of the 150th anniversary of your parish. As we will shortly discover, the readings that the Church has selected for today’s Mass are particularly relevant to both of those conclusions that we keep in mind today.

One key for the interpretation of today’s scriptural readings is important to keep in mind. We have to understand that the prophet Daniel, in our first reading, and Mark, chapter 13, in today’s Gospel, are both “apocalyptic” in their genre and vocabulary. This does *not* mean they are consumed with a focus on a cataclysmic end of the world as is often depicted in movies and stories of the apocalyptic genre today. “Apocalypse,” in the Church’s terminology, comes from a compound Greek word made up of: “*apo*” – meaning “off,” “away,” or “from” – and “*kalyptein*” – meaning a covering or veil – so it has the overall sense of something being uncovered

or unveiled. This is where the book of "Revelation," sometimes itself called the "Apocalypse," which is full of this same kind of cosmic and calamitous imagery, gets its name. "Revelation" is a word with *Latin* roots meaning almost precisely the same as "apocalypse," "re-vel-ation", to *remove* a *veil* or to reveal something. So, when we turn to these passages, we must see them not so much as a prediction of destruction, but as an unveiling, a disclosure, an *exposition* of something that God wants us to know.

Daniel writes to the Jewish exiles in Babylon of a vision he was given. He is shown the future day when Michael, the great prince and leader of the hosts of God, will appear. It will be a day of great distress, but also a day of great hope. It is the day of eternity, and for those who are in the book of life, the ranks of God's faithful, they will be led to freedom, and not only freedom from Babylon, but freedom from death itself! Some will not enter into eternal life, but eternal death, and we can almost feel Daniel's sadness at the message he gives to them: "*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace*" (Daniel 12:2).] This is not an easy message to hear, but we should let these words strike us with their full force. Daniel is sitting far from his homeland and has been forced into despicable service to the king of Babylon. He

knows that Jerusalem has been destroyed, and he sees his fellow Jewish refugees now scattered in this foreign land, impoverished, and struggling to make ends meet, much less figure out what to make of God's promises in the midst of this horrible exile. It is a dismal situation! *Now*, he hears of a coming day that will be *worse*. He is stuck in a pretty lousy period, but the word of the Lord speaks of a period "*unsurpassed in distress since nations began*" (Daniel 12:1).

"When will this happen?!" We can imagine Daniel's listeners asking the prophet. And this is almost precisely the question on the minds of Jesus' followers when he predicts the destruction of the Temple 600 years later. Jesus' disciples immediately recognize the similarities of His language to Daniel's as He shockingly predicts the destruction of Jerusalem as He and His disciples look out over the beautiful city. "*Not one stone will be left upon another,*" the Lord tells them as they admire the splendid white marble, gold decorations, and luxurious curtains of the Temple visible for miles around. Famines, wars, parents turning in their children, sacrilege of the worst kind: Jesus says these will come. Beyond all this, Jesus – meek and mild, humble and loving, patient and merciful – says that "*after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from*

the sky . . ." (Mark 13:24). The destruction Christ speaks of is tremendous. Not only will their beloved capital city be destroyed, but the heart of their faith and culture and economy will be devastated, their families will be torn asunder, and then the stars, their source of time, position, and symbolic of the stability of all creation, will fall from the sky.

It would be as if a nuclear bomb struck Washington DC, followed by a tornado that destroys our own city, with losses and strife in our families at the same time, and then the planets and stars cease to follow the laws of physics, and then the internet and all communication systems go down. It's hard to even imagine such a calamity! Truly, Lord, we ask: "When will this happen?"

At first, Jesus' response must puzzle us: he says both "*this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place*" and then a line later "*but of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father*" (Mark 13:31-32). He refers with the first words to the destruction of Jerusalem – which did happen, horrifically, only 40 years after He said these words – but with the second line, it seems, he refers forward to the destruction of time and space, the timing of which is in the Father's heart.

But what about us, stuck between these two horrible periods? We see that Jesus situates us in the time of tribulation, family-strife, trials, and sufferings – and perhaps looking around – we can see some of that in our own day! – but what are we to *do* in this in-between time?

Liturgically, of course, we are also in an in-between moment, between our celebrations of Christ's life, ministry, and death and resurrection, and that of the fullness of His Kingship ... but how does this help us to stay faithful disciples in the midst of a difficult age?

Between those two lines of Jesus come the most important one: "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but **my words will not pass away***" (Mark 13:31). During the hard times, when everything, or everyone else, may waver and fail us, **Christ remains firm.**

I began this homily thanking God that we can conclude this year's celebrations as we began it: with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. But now that we have meditated upon these readings, we find that the Mass must all the more be our foundation and security. Here, at every Mass, we definitively meet Christ! Do we approach Him with *trust*, and *openness*, and *love*? Do we prepare for this encounter as if our life depended on it? **Because it does!**

The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote to them, stating definitively that no sacrifice or action other than that of Christ, other than that of the Eucharist, can save us from sin and establish us in God's love. Nothing, and no one, else can save us. Nothing, and no one, else is sure to be there for us. Nothing, and no one, can assure use of final victory. **Only Jesus.** He, our Lord, "*... offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God; now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated*" (Hebrews 10:12-14).

My brothers and sisters, at first perhaps, it is with a certain amount of sadness that we approach this final festive gathering. When anything good comes to an end, we naturally feel a loss as we bid goodbye. However, just as the end of the liturgical year only catapults us onto the next one, so it is the case that this concluding Mass, and the entire year of grace that has come before it, should only send us onto greater graces and joys in the years to come. The other celebrations may change or cease, but the Mass will always be available to us. It is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass that has sustained this parish for 150 years, and will continue to be the source and summit of its existence in the years ahead.

No matter what awaits us, whether joys or sorrows, success or trials, we know that at every Mass we encounter God, and are embraced by Him.

With Him, we need not fear anything.

May God give us this grace, Amen.