

HOMILY FOR THE COURAGE/ENCOURAGE CONFERENCE
CHAPEL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. MARY OF THE LAKE
MUNDELEIN, ILLINOIS

Votive Mass of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
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A recent Google™ search on the Internet for the name “Matthew Shepard” produced 11,900,000 results. Matthew Shepherd was a 21 year old college student who was savagely beaten to death in 1998 in Wyoming. His murder has been called a hate crime because Shepard was gay.

A similar search on the Internet for the name “Mary Stachowicz” yielded 26,800 results. In 2002, Mary Stachowicz was also brutally murdered, but the circumstances were quite different. Mary, the gentle, devout 51-year-old Catholic mother of four urged her co-worker, Nicholas Gutierrez, 19, to change his gay lifestyle. Infuriated by this, as he later told police, he allegedly beat, stabbed and strangled her to death and then stuffed her mangled body in a crawl space in his apartment, located above a Chicago funeral home, where they both worked. I know about Mary Stachowicz, not from the Internet, but personally, because Mary was

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my secretary at the parish where I was pastor before I was named a Bishop. She worked part time at the funeral home and part time at the parish. One afternoon, she didn't show up at her usual starting time. This was unusual because she was always on time. A call to the funeral home disclosed that her car was still in their parking lot and her purse with her car keys was still at her desk, but there was no sign of Mary. As Mary's family and friends prayed and worried about her disappearance, Gutierrez prayed with them. Three days later, her mutilated body was discovered in a crawl space in his apartment.

Both murders were senseless and brutal, and I condemn them both unequivocally. However, the fact that there are over eleven and a half million more Internet stories about Matthew Shepard than Mary Stachowicz indicates where popular sentiment lies today on the question of same-sex relationships. Shepard's story has received such widespread attention because his homosexuality was the chief motive for his murder. Mary's murder has been widely ignored by the media, despite the fact that she died as a martyr for her faith.

My point is that, in the light of popular opinion today, I recognize that we have an uphill struggle to persuade people of the reasons why

homosexual activity is sinful, why same-sex relationships should not be legally recognized as marriages, and why chastity is virtuous,.

If we feel that we face an uphill struggle in this regard, we should take heart from today's scriptural readings (*Jeremiah 26:1-9; Matthew 13:54-58*.) In them, we hear that the message of the prophet Jeremiah and the teaching of Jesus both fell on deaf ears. Yet despite these rejections, we are urged to pay attention to God's voice. The Church and the Bible speak to us with authority, but God also speaks to us in many and diverse ways. He speaks through saints. God also speaks through sinners: a doubting Thomas, a confused Philip, a denying Simon Peter. God even speaks through us, and that is why we must have the courage to speak up for God's truth even in the face of a hostile culture and unreceptive listeners.

As we offer this Mass today as part of the Courage/EnCourage Conference, we come here as people who accept the truth as taught by the Catholic Church. Yet, we seek God's help to put this truth into practice in our daily lives and in our society. We cannot do so relying only on our own human abilities. We need God's grace. And so our liturgy selected for today is the Votive Mass of the Sacred Heart, because it is from that loving heart that divine mercy and love were poured out for our salvation.

When I was named a bishop by Pope John Paul II seven years ago, I chose as my Episcopal motto the phrase, *Lex Cordis Caritas*, Latin for, “The Law of the Heart is Love.” This motto is based on Sacred Scripture. In chapter 31 of the Book of Jeremiah, the prophet tells us that God has written His law on our hearts. In chapter 13 of the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul says that love is the fulfillment of the law. To depict this visually, my coat of arms has two scales of justice to reflect my background in civil law and canon law, but above them both is the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On the cross, from His heart, He poured out for us His unconditional love and divine mercy. The Preface for the Mass of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, says: “Lifted high on the cross, Christ gave his life for us, so much did He love us. From His wounded side flowed blood and water, the fountain of sacramental life in the Church. To His open heart the Savior invites all men, to draw water in joy from the springs of salvation.”

Traditionally in the Church we have sought the graces of God and His divine assistance through the intercession of the saints, whose mediation we seek as patrons beseeching God on our behalf. That is why I began my homily telling you about Mary Stachowicz. I said that Mary died as a martyr for the faith. As such, I believe that she would be a worthy

candidate for official canonization as a saint by the Catholic Church. Her death as a martyr for the faith means that a miracle is not necessary for her official beatification or canonization. However, even a martyr of the faith does not enter the Church's official martyrology of saints without the promotion of her cause, and the promotion of her cause requires a group of people who recognize her Christian sanctity and pray not only for the official recognition of her sainthood, but also pray through her intercession for assistance in obtaining divine favors.

This is where I believe Courage and EnCourage can become involved. I have spoken with Father John Harvey and Father Paul Check and they agree that Mary Stachowicz would be an appropriate patron saint for Courage and EnCourage. But for that to happen, your prayers are needed. I have brought some prayer cards with the picture of Mary Stachowicz and the text of a suggested prayer. These prayer cards are at the back of the chapel and I invite you to take one or as many as you want to use, asking Mary Stachowicz to implore God's graces to fortify you in your struggles as members of Courage and EnCourage.

As we continue this Mass, may we remember the courage that Mary Stachowicz demonstrated in bearing witness to the faith to the point of

shedding her blood and giving her life for the Truth. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus, whose Real Presence we will receive into our hearts in a few moments, pour out his divine mercy and love to give us the courage and strength we need to live as He has taught us in conformity with His Truth.

May God give us this grace. Amen.