

**HOMILY FOR EVENING PRAYER FOR THE VIGIL OF THE INSTALLATION
OF THE MOST REV. THOMAS JOHN PAPROCKI AS THE
NINTH BISHOP OF SPRINGFIELD IN ILLINOIS**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Feast of Ss. Thomas More and John Fisher
June 21, 2010**

My dear brother Bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious, civic officials, ecumenical and inter-faith leaders, brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a joy to be with you this evening.

On this eve of my Installation as the Ninth Bishop of Springfield in Illinois, I am pleased that you have come to join me in prayer asking God to help me to carry out my new responsibilities. I look forward to spending time with you, getting to know you, listening to you and learning how to be a good Bishop for you.

Last week I attended the Special Assembly of the Bishops of the United States, which addressed the topic, "The Bishop as Agent of Hope for His Priests." I hope to be such an agent of hope for the priests of the Diocese of Springfield as a father, a brother and a friend to you.

I welcome the ecumenical and interfaith leaders that are here with us. I am hopeful that we fellow Christians can find ways to work towards Christian unity to fulfill the prayer of our Lord and

Savior, “That all may be one” (John 17:21). I look forward to collaborating with leaders of all faiths to promote the virtues of religion and the values that we hold in common.

I welcome the many government and civic leaders present here this evening. My major field of study in college was political science, I enjoy reading about Abraham Lincoln, and I am licensed to practice law in the State of Illinois. Those personal traits give us some things in common, but I come to you not as a political scientist, or lobbyist, or lawyer, but as a shepherd of souls. As such I seek first and foremost to have a pastoral relationship with you, and help to guide you in that most important relationship of all, our relationship with God.

Some of you here this evening have known me for years. For many of you, however, this may be the first time that you’re hearing from me directly and you might be wishing to know more about me. Normally I don’t like to talk about myself in a homily, but I would like to give you some idea of the person who will be the new Bishop of this diocese. So I would like to fill in some of those blanks for you not so much by talking about myself directly, but by talking about my heroes and other people who have greatly influenced my life and

have helped to shape the person that I am today. I will do so not in any particular order of importance or chronology.

First, I would like to tell you about a dream that awoke me in the middle of the night during the summer of 2002. I remember it precisely because I don't normally remember the details of my dreams, yet this one still sticks clearly in my mind. On a July night in 2002 while I was Pastor of St. Constance Parish on the northwest side of Chicago, the late John Cardinal Cody appeared to me in this dream. Cardinal Cody was a significant figure in my life for a number of reasons. He was appointed Archbishop of Chicago in 1965. A year later I began our high school seminary, Quigley South, and so he was my Archbishop throughout the next twelve years that I spent in our seminary system at Quigley, Niles College Seminary of Loyola University and Mundelein Seminary. Cardinal Cody ordained me both to the diaconate and to the priesthood. He was my Archbishop for the first four years that I served as a priest. I had never dreamt about Cardinal Cody previously and have never dreamt about him since that summer of 2002. So what was so significant and memorable about Cardinal Cody appearing in this singular dream? Well, in this dream, Cardinal Cody not only

appeared, but he had a message for me. He said that he had come to tell me that I would be a bishop. Not only that, but he also told me where: Cardinal Cody said that I would be Bishop of Madison, Wisconsin! Right idea: state capital, wrong state! OK, so God's messengers apparently don't always get their facts straight! (Sort of like my predicting that the Blackhawks would beat the Philadelphia Flyers in five games to win the Stanley Cup, while it actually took them six!) The fact is that the core of the message turned out to be true, as just seven months later, in January 2003, Pope John Paul II appointed me Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago.

Cardinal Cody's successors also had a profound impact on my life. After Cardinal Cody died in 1982, he was succeeded by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin. Shortly before he arrived in Chicago, I had completed law school at DePaul University College of Law and had co-founded the South Chicago Legal Clinic with my classmate and friend, Ed Grossman, as a way to help provide legal services for the poor. So I went to tell Cardinal Bernardin about this project, since it was a rather unusual ministry for a parish priest. He gave me his blessing with the reminder that, as a priest-lawyer, the priest always came first. I have remembered that injunction to this day.

It was Cardinal Bernardin who named me Vice-Chancellor, then sent me to Rome to get my doctorate in canon law at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and then made me his Chancellor. It was my privilege to serve him and the Archdiocese in this capacity as canonical advisor until the day he died in November 1996.

Cardinal Bernardin was succeeded by Cardinal Francis George in 1997 and I continued as Chancellor until the end of my second term in June 2000. Then Cardinal George gave me permission to spend that summer studying Polish language and culture in Cracow, Poland. Shortly after my return, he appointed me Pastor of St. Constance Parish, a large Polish-American parish on the northwest side of Chicago. These were very happy years in direct parish ministry serving the people of God.

A major change came in January 2003 when Pope John Paul II appointed me to serve as Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago and Cardinal George assigned me as his Episcopal Vicar for Vicariate IV, overseeing a region of the Archdiocese. Cardinal George also made me his Liaison for the Polish Community in Chicago as well as Liaison for Health and Hospital Affairs. For the past seven years it has been my privilege to collaborate closely with Cardinal George

and my fellow Auxiliary Bishops. We worked well together and I learned a lot from these experiences.

As a Polish-American, for me the most significant person in the hierarchy of the Church was our great Holy Father, Pope John Paul II. He was elected Pope just five months after my ordination as a priest and he would serve as Pope for the next twenty-seven years of my priesthood, so obviously he had a great influence over my life and ministry. I am blessed that the Papal Letter appointing me Bishop in 2003 bears his signature.

In my homilies over the past seven years on the occasion of the installation of a new pastor, I have recommended a theme suggested by our Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter, *NOVO MILLENNIO INEUNTE*, “On entering the New Millennium,” which I quote as follows (nos. 30-31): “First of all, I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to *holiness*. . . . To ask catechumens: ‘Do you wish to receive Baptism?’ means at the same time to ask them: ‘Do you wish to become holy?’ It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (*Mt 5:48*)”. As a bishop of the new millennium, I pledge myself to this goal, that all pastoral

initiatives be set in relation to holiness, and I will urge the pastors of this diocese to collaborate with me in working towards that goal.

In saying this, I acknowledge that I am not starting from scratch, but will be building on the strong foundation that has been set over the past 157 years of the history of this diocese, especially by my immediate predecessor Archbishop George Lucas, now Archbishop of Omaha, and continued during this past year by Monsignor Carl Kemme, Diocesan Administrator. In 2003, then Bishop Lucas led the jubilee celebrations for the 150th anniversary of this diocese. I was present for the Jubilee Mass. In conjunction with that Jubilee, he promulgated a Diocesan Pastoral Plan with the following four goals:

- To grow in our communion with God and one another through prayer and the celebration of the sacraments, especially Sunday Eucharist;
- To respond to God's call with lives of commitment and generous service;
- To study and share Sacred Scripture and our Catholic Faith;
and,

- To live our Catholic Faith by practicing charity and justice.

These four goals fit well with Pope John Paul II's call for all pastoral initiatives to be set in relation to holiness, and so it is my intention to continue to follow this Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

Of course, the story of those who have influenced my journey of faith must refer back to the beginning with my parents. My Dad, John H. Paprocki, Jr., was a pharmacist. Before finishing pharmacy school and marrying my mother, Veronica, he served as a pharmacy technician in Army hospitals in Europe during World War II. Prior to that, he was in the seminary, graduating from Quigley and attending Mundelein Seminary until he discerned that the Lord was not calling him to be a priest. Of course he didn't know at the time that his vocation was to be the father of nine children, one of whom would someday be standing here as your new bishop. Dad was a quiet man, but he spoke volumes with his actions. He taught his family what was important by where he took us. In order of frequency and importance, they were: St. Casimir Church, which was our parish church one block away from where we lived; the homes of our aunts, uncles and cousins; the second balcony of the

old Chicago Stadium, home of the Chicago Blackhawks; and Comiskey Park, home of the Chicago White Sox. Oh yes, there were occasional visits to Wrigley Field to see a curiosity known as the Chicago Cubs! Dad died in 1997 at the age of 76, but I still count on his prayers and intercessions to guide me in matters that are really important in life.

My mother, born Veronica Bonat, is a person that I call an intentional Catholic. What I mean by that is that her parents were Catholic but never had her or her younger brother baptized. So when she was thirteen years old, she took her brother Eugene by the hand and together they walked up to the rectory at St. Casimir Parish, rang the doorbell and told the priest they wanted to be baptized. After receiving instructions in the faith, they were baptized, and the priest who instructed them kept in touch with our family for years after that until the day he died. His name was Father Stanley Rokicinski, whom we called Father Rocky for short. He was the first priest that I got to know personally and he was a real inspiration for my vocation. My mother tells me that I was about four years old when I started talking about wanting to be a priest, largely due to the impression that Father Rocky had made

upon me as a young boy. Because of this, I am very aware of the importance of good role models for influencing the lives of young people.

The picture would not be complete without telling you about some of the figures who influenced my decision to study law. When I was eight years old, a Catholic by the name of John F. Kennedy was elected as President of the United States, the first Catholic to hold the highest office in our country. His campaign and his presidency got me interested in politics and government. So as a student at Loyola University I majored in political science and eventually decided that I would study law at DePaul University to acquire a tool for ministry that would put action behind the words of concern for justice.

It was as a student in eighth-grade that I first visited our state capital and became familiar with Springfield's most famous citizen, Abraham Lincoln. Just a few years later, a similar field trip when I was in high school deepened my admiration for our sixteenth President. Since that time, I have read a number of biographies about Mr. Lincoln from various perspectives: Lincoln and religion, Lincoln and the law, Lincoln and his family, Lincoln and his

cabinet, etc. He is for me one of the most fascinating figures of all time, and I am thrilled to be living just down the street from the Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in the same town where he lived and worked for over twenty years and where he is buried.

The sentiments expressed by President Lincoln at the conclusion of his Second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865, just days before his death, set a tone that I wish to emulate as I begin my ministry here in central Illinois: “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in.” As St. Paul put it, “May God who has begun this good work bring it to completion” (Philippians 1:6).

I would like to conclude with some words of praise and thanksgiving for all the wonderful people that have shaped my life over the years and have been instrumental in guiding me to my greatest hero of all, our loving and merciful God.

In William Shakespeare’s play, *Henry V*, there is a powerful scene preceding the Battle of Agincourt on St. Crispin’s Day, October 25, 1415. The English are outnumbered by the French five to one. When King Henry overhears someone wish that some of the

unemployed men back in England could have been with them to help them in battle, the King delivers his impassioned address to his troops in what is known as the St. Crispin's Day speech:

*The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
 God's will, I pray thee, wish not one man more. . . .
 This day is called the Feast of Crispian:
 He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
 Will stand a-tiptoe when the day is named,
 And rouse him at the name of Crispian. . . .
 This story shall the good man teach his son;
 And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
 From this day to the ending of the world,
 But we in it shall be remember'd;
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
 For he today that sheds his blood with me
 Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
 This day shall gentle his condition:
 And gentlemen in England now abed
 Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
 And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
 That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day. (IV, iii)*

As we all know, roused and inspired by Henry's oratory, the King and his band of brothers go on to victory, despite the overwhelming odds. After the Battle of Agincourt, when it was apparent that the English had been victorious, Henry V proclaimed,

*Come, go we in procession to the village . . .
 but with this acknowledgment,*

That God fought for us. . .

Do we all holy rites.

Let there by sung “Non nobis” and “Te Deum.”

The King was referring to the Latin hymn of praise to God called the “*Te Deum*” and to the opening words of Psalm 115: “*Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomine tuo, da Gloriam*” – “Not to us. Lord, not to us, but to your name, give the glory.”

May God, my hero of all heroes, give us this grace. Amen.