

**150th Anniversary Mass of the Presence of the
School Sisters of Notre Dame in Teutopolis at
St. Francis of Assisi Church, Teutopolis, Illinois**

**The Twenty-Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year A
October 9, 2011**

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

Reverend Fathers, School Sisters of Notre Dame, dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good to be with you today at St. Francis of Assisi Church to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Teutopolis. Blessed Mother Mary Teresa of Jesus Gerhardinger established the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1833 to help in the education of the poor. She sent her Sisters out in groups of two or of three and said to them: "Let us never forget the love of Jesus for children, whom he took upon his lap and blessed."

Twenty-eight years after the initial founding of the Order, the School Sisters of Notre Dame arrived in Teutopolis on December 7th, 1861 at the invitation of Father Damian Hennewig, O.F.M., Pastor of St. Francis Parish, with the approval of my predecessor, Bishop Henry Damian Juncker, just three years after the arrival of the Order of Friars Minor. Sister Margaret

Mueller, S.S.N.D. and Sister Mauritia Uzman, S.S.N.D. arrived with candidate Margaret Rudolph and began teaching alongside lay teachers in the public school system. Those early Sisters knew the reality described by Saint Paul in today's second reading, "the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need" (Philippians 4:12). As they looked to the spiritual needs of their pupils, the citizens of Teutopolis looked to their physical needs. The rest, as they say, is history.

Today we gather not only to render humble thanks and worship to Almighty God for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, as we do every Sunday, but also to give thanks for the great vision of Mother Teresa Gerhardinger and for the many women who followed in her footsteps. Mindful of the words of the Apostle Paul, these women set out with a great missionary zeal, confident that they could all things in Christ who would strengthen them (cf. Philippians 4:13). To the many people they encountered, both young and old alike, these Sisters extended the invitation of Jesus Christ: "Behold, I have prepared my banquet...and everything is ready; come to the feast" (Matthew 22:4)! So it is that we have gathered here today around the altar of the Lord to share in the foretaste of the wedding banquet of the Lamb.

Today's Gospel uses the imagery of a delicious banquet as one of the most satisfying and enjoyable experiences the human mind could imagine. If we were invited to this feast, would we not jump at the chance? What on earth could stand in our way? The Gospel asks this question of us - and warns that the experience of others is that when some people have been invited, they have found other concerns too important to bother with the invitation. Some have even been hostile to those who delivered it. This can be seen in the fate of many of the prophets, and of Jesus himself. The depiction of the king mounting a military campaign and destroying the city may be said to refer to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The words about the unprepared guest can imply that, once people have responded to the invitation by faith and baptism, there is a further expectation to live a just life of good works. Membership in the Church alone does not guarantee salvation. There must also be an appropriate response of putting the teachings of the Gospel into practice.

A good number of the Sisters who have served in Teutopolis over the years, putting the teachings of the Gospel into practice, have passed from this life in the hope of enjoying the heavenly banquet. Today, with thanksgiving for the many blessings the Lord bestowed upon the people of

Teutopolis through their faithful service that has borne much fruit, we pray the Lord will find in their labors a choice vintage and welcome them into his Kingdom to sing his praises with their Blessed Foundress. May they dwell in the house of the Lord forevermore (cf. Psalm 23:6).

We give thanks, too, for the many Sisters present among us today and for the School Sisters throughout the world who continue to remember the love of Jesus for children and who seek to emulate this love each day of their lives. We pray the Lord will continue to “fully supply whatever [they] need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

These past one hundred and fifty years, the School Sisters of Notre Dame have not ceased to remember the love of Jesus for children here in the Teutopolis area. For this long-standing fidelity I am deeply grateful and I look forward to many more years of children coming to know the love of Jesus for them through the daughters of Mother Teresa Gerhardinger.

After a full day of teaching children of this physical world, the Sisters so often blessed the children, teaching them the greater importance of faith and of authentic discipleship. “My dear children,” they said as they sent

their pupils home, "I commend you to the Holy Spirit, through the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and I entrust you forever to her blessed hands." With this blessing, they taught many how to enter the banquet of heaven wearing the proper wedding garment (cf. Matthew 22:12).

As we give thanks for the School Sisters of Notre Dame, let us ask the Lord to reward his faithful servants. Let us beg the Lord to raise up more women with the missionary zeal of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Let us beseech the Lord to allow more children to experience his love for them through the dedicated service of the School Sisters.

My dear Sisters, in a few moments you will renew before us the vows you took when you first entered the Order. Let the joy and zeal that filled your heart that day – however long ago it was – flood your heart again today! The Lord has chosen you from the world to bear fruit that will remain. Seek to live always that first enthusiasm of knowing your vocation! With this great joy shining forth from you, you will teach others to recognize the presence of God and rejoice with them that he has saved us (cf. Isaiah 25:9).

With these sentiments, dear Sisters and daughters in Christ, I am happy to give to you the blessing you so often gave: My dear Sisters, I commend you to the Holy Spirit, through the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and I entrust you forever to her hands." Safe in her hands, she will help you do whatever the Lord tells you and the Lord will accept you as he has promised.

May God give us this grace. Amen.