

**100th Anniversary of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas
Court 148**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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

Dear [Reverend Monsignors and Fathers], Catholic Daughters of the Americas, brothers and sisters in Christ, this evening in this celebration of the Holy Mass, we are gathered together in prayer, as if in the Upper Room, awaiting the promised gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 24:49).

It is this same Spirit of which the Lord God said through his prophet Joel, “I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh” (Joel 3:1). Indeed, it is this same Spirit who “swept over the waters” of the “formless wasteland” at the moment of Creation (Genesis 1:2). God breathed his Spirit over the watery chaos and brought to it order and life. And when he had finished breathing his Spirit over creation, when he had spoken his word and breathed his breath, his Spirit, into Adam and Eve and given them life, God saw that his Creation “was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Examining modern Western society today, one might well see glimpses of that “formless wasteland” needing God’s Spirit to bring

order and life to chaos. What was once known to be morally right is now becoming condemned as intolerant and what was once known to be in accord with the natural law is being challenged and threatened with moral and social degeneration.

We see a certain evidence of this in the passage of the recent legislation that authorized civil unions in the State of Illinois. Some people rationalize their views and their behavior saying, “Civil unions became legal in Illinois on June 1st, but the world didn’t end and the sun rose as usual on June 2nd.” Well, yes, the sun rose again this morning, but on what kind of world?

Marriage is a social institution that pre-dates Christianity. Jesus did not invent marriage. He made matrimony a sacrament between the baptized, but marriage between a man and a woman has always been one of the fundamental units of a stable social order from the beginning of civilization.

Unfortunately we now see an increasing number of children born out of wedlock; today, 52.3% of children born in the United States of America are born outside of marriage.¹ The number of families headed by a husband and wife is also declining; presently in the United States, just 48.4% of families are under the care of a

husband and wife.² That's down from 70.5% of families that were headed by married-couple families just forty-one years ago, in 1970.³

Looking around society today, one might well ask, "Is this very good?" Certainly these figures do not bode well for the future of our nation.

To the extent that parts of modern society are contrary to the authentic good, we must examine our part and the role we have – or have not – played, for this formless wasteland has come about because of a weakening of conscience and of poorly formed consciences in particular. We need today a fresh and renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit to bring order to this chaos and to breathe life into us once again!

In his address this past weekend to the cultural world of Croatia – and, really, to all of Europe and the West – Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the conscience as "the bulwark against all forms of tyranny."⁴

Noting the great confusion of the world today and the lack of moral guidance, he said:

If, in keeping with the prevailing modern idea, conscience is reduced to the subjective field to which religion and morality have been banished, then the crisis of the West has no remedy and Europe is destined to collapse in on itself. If, on the other hand, conscience is rediscovered as the place in which to listen to truth and good, the place of responsibility before God and before fellow human beings – in other words, the bulwark against all forms of tyranny – then there is hope for the future.⁵

His words ring equally true here in these United States of America.

We must rediscover the beauty of a properly formed conscience, upon which “the quality of social and civil life and the quality of democracy depend in large measure.”⁶

How, then, do we rediscover the truth of an authentically formed conscience as the place of responsibility before God and fellow human beings? We do so by restoring the value and the importance of the family and by seeking to defend and safeguard it from the many threats, these various forms of tyranny, which surround it.

The traditional family headed by a mother and a father is vital to the quality of social and civic life because it is within the family that the conscience is first formed and right and wrong is learned.

The conscience is

learnt in infancy and adolescence, is then lived out in every area of life, in games, in sport, in interpersonal relations, in art, in voluntary service to the poor and the suffering, and once it has been assimilated it can be applied to the most complex areas of political and economic life so as to build up a *polis* [a city] that is welcoming and hospitable, but at the same time not empty, not falsely neutral, but rich in humanity, with a strongly ethical dimension. It is here that the *lay faithful* are called to give generously of the formation they have received, guided by the principles of the Church's Social Doctrine, for the sake of authentic secularism, social justice, the defense of life and of the family, freedom of religion and education.⁷

This is why we can rightly refer to the family as the building block of civilization. And it is to the family and to the teaching of the faith, that you, dear Catholic Daughters of the Americas, must rededicate yourselves anew with an ever greater zeal.

Even as the family weakens and is under attack, the fundamental and foundational importance of the family has not diminished; it never will diminish.

Several years ago, in 2001, Blessed Pope John Paul II declared that "the time of the family has arrived."⁸ By this the Holy Father meant that the time has come for families to ground themselves more solidly in Christ and in the teachings of the Church, to properly form the consciences of the young and of the old, so as to

transform society into a place where every person can attain his or her full potential in accord with what is good and true.

Because so much of family life and the passing on of faith and morals belongs to mothers and grandmothers, this important task rests upon you, dear women; your time has arrived.

Among the many reasons that could be proposed for the breakdown of modern families and society, one might suggest the greatest of these is an over-emphasis on freedom and a lack of emphasis on responsibility; indeed, the principal cause could be understood to be a false understanding of freedom, that ultimately turns people into slaves of their own desires. As the Holy Father Benedict XVI said this past weekend:

Freedom without commitment to the truth is made into an absolute, and individual well-being through the consumption of material goods and transient experiences is cultivated as an ideal, obscuring the quality of interpersonal relations and deeper human values; love is reduced to sentimental emotion and to the gratification of instinctive impulses, without a commitment to build lasting bonds of reciprocal belonging and without openness to life. We are called to oppose such a mentality! Alongside what the Church says, the testimony and commitment of the Christian family – your concrete testimony – is very important, especially when you affirm the inviolability of human life from conception until natural death, the singular and irreplaceable value of the family founded upon matrimony and the need for legislation which supports families in the task of giving birth to children and educating

them. Dear families, be courageous! Do not give in to that secularized mentality which proposes living together as a preparation, or even a substitute for marriage! Show by the witness of your lives that it is possible, like Christ, to love without reserve, and do not be afraid to make a commitment to another person! Dear families, rejoice in fatherhood and motherhood! Openness to life is a sign of openness to the future, confidence in the future, just as respect for the natural moral law frees people, rather than demeaning them!⁹

This is where you, the Catholic Daughters of the Americas, come into play.

Relying solely upon human ingenuity and strategies, the renewal of society is impossible, but “for God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

Let us, then, implore God Most High: “Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth” (Psalm 104:30). Let us beg the Lord to pour out his Holy Spirit upon all humanity and lead us into the fullness of truth, who is Jesus Christ, that all people might be united in charity.

As we call upon the Holy Spirit to restore order and life to society, let us seek to form our consciences properly, so that we might always act with the knowledge of the truth to choose that which is good. If we use the gifts of the Holy Spirit often and well

the Lord can indeed renew the face of the earth by our keeping to the obedience of faith.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstracts of the United States: 2011*, 130th Edition. (Washington, D.C., 2010), Table 85.

² U.S. Census Bureau, *Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics 2010*. <<http://www.factfinder.census.gov>>

³ LaMarotte, <http://lamarotte2.blogspot.com/2011/05/new-minority.html>, May 26, 2011.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Meetings with Representatives of Civil Society, Political, Cultural and Business World, Diplomatic Corps and Religious Leaders*, June 4, 2011.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Blessed Pope John Paul II, *Angelus Address*, October 21, 2001.

⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily*, June 5, 2011.