

**Fathers in Faith and Family
Springfield Area Catholic Men's Conference Breakfast Remarks
November 5, 2011**

**St. John Vianney Parish Activity Center
Sherman, Illinois**

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

Reverend Monsignor(s), Fathers and Deacons, dear brothers in Christ, as your Bishop I am happy to be able to join you this morning this Fathers in Faith and Family Conference. I thank Father George McInnis for his fine reflections this morning and pray they will bear great fruit in your lives as you seek to follow Jesus Christ ever more faithfully.

Earlier this week you may have heard about a remarkable landing of a Boeing 767 in Warsaw, Poland. The flight carrying 231 people from the United States had to land on the belly of the plane because the landing gear would not release due to a mechanical failure. The pilot landed the plane with great skill and no one was injured in the emergency landing.

This is certainly encouraging news and the pilot has rightly been praised and commended; many of these situations do not end so well. But there is another aspect of this story you might not have heard: a husband,

for whatever reason, rushed off of the plane once it was landed, leaving his wife behind in the plane!

This reminds me of another story from a year or so ago involving a boyfriend who, while attending a baseball game, moved out of the way of a stray ball that then hit his girlfriend.

Tragic as these incidences are, we laugh at them. Why do we find such stories humorous?

Laughter often comes from what is unexpected. We might give these two men the benefit of the doubt and presume they were acting only from the instinct of self-preservation. Yet even if this is the case, we still find such situations humorous. Why?

The reason is simple: We don't expect men to act in such a way. Men - and husbands, especially - are to risk themselves to protect women - and their wives, especially. We know this almost as instinctively as the need for self-preservation, which is why we find these situations so comical.

And yet, even as we know how men *should* treat women, we are facing an increasing number of men who fail to treat women with deference, honor and respect. From the time of the great mariners this cry has come to down to us: "Abandon ship! Women and children first!"

Everyone knows the captain goes down with the ship. What has happened to us when so many men care more about saving themselves than they do about saving women and children? How many captains today would willingly go down with the ship to save the women and children?

Certainly I am not suggesting that we men need to place ourselves in harm's way, but when difficult situations come neither should we flee from them. Our lives must be lives lived for others, for God and our families and neighbors.

You who are husbands, and you who aspire one day to be husbands: hear again the words of Saint Paul addressed to you: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). The two men I mentioned earlier did not love their wives - or girlfriends - in this manner as they should have; they loved themselves first.

How did Christ love the Church? He "gave himself up for her," by which Saint Paul means that accepted even death, "death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). "In this," says Saint John, "is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be expiation for our sins" (I John 4:10). It is this love show clearly shown for us to which Saint Paul refers

when he says, "Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus who ... emptied himself" (Philippians 2:5-6).

If you wonder if you are a good husband - or if you will be a good husband - you need only ask yourself: is the love of Jesus Christ in me? Do I love my wife as Christ loves the Church? Am I willing to lay down my life, to set my own desires aside, for my bride?

Perhaps what I am trying to suggest is best summed up by a new motivational poster I recently saw. You've all seen the sort of which I mean: images - often of a mountain peak - surrounded by a black border with a key word in bold and a brief statement beneath. Some of these posters truly are inspiring and some are simply trite. There is a new poster circulating on the Internet that depicts Jesus hanging on the Cross. Beneath the image is the word "Manhood" with the simple phrase, "He did it best."

The only way to overcome the crisis in masculinity we are currently facing is to look to the example of Jesus Christ who best embodies what it means to be a man.

May God give us this grace. Amen.