

**First Profession and Institution into the Novitiate
Of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George
Alton, Illinois**

**The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
August 15, 2011**

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

Your Eminence, Your Excellencies, Reverend Mother Regina Pacis, dear Religious Sisters, brother priests and deacons, my brothers and sisters in Christ: it gives me great joy, as the Bishop of this local Church, to welcome you here today and to greet you most warmly on this great Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. "Let us rejoice in the Lord and celebrate this feast in honor of the Virgin Mary, at whose assumption the angels rejoice, giving praise to the Son of God!"¹ Today, Mary, our Mother, has been "borne in with gladness and joy;" [she] enter[s] the palace of the king" who once entered her womb (Psalm 45:16).

It is a privilege for me to be here with you again and to celebrate the First Profession of your Novices, Sister Mary Bernadette Morse and Sister Mary Isabella Erb, as well as the reception into the Novitiate of your Postulants Erin Leis, Samantha Goodson, Ashley Vola and Miranda Edgar,

now to be known henceforth respectively as Sister Teresa Maria, Sister Mary Francis, Sister Mary Catarina, and Sister Mary Peter.

As is customary, all of you have taken Maria or Mary as part of your name in religious life in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We look to Mary, who shines brightly before us as a sign of hope and comfort shedding light upon the path of our pilgrim journey to her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.² As a loving Son, he has assumed his Mother into heaven to be with him forever. As we look to her, we hope to be with her in the presence of her Son, there to know the fullness of joy.

Falling in love at first sight is a familiar theme in films, books and countless love songs, and it's far from being a new theme. From the ancient Greeks and Romans through to modern stage and film, the idea that love can be inspired by just the sight of someone is a common thread.

Perhaps the most famous example of all is Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Not just one character, but both main characters experience love at first sight. Romeo and Juliet fall in love instantly at a ball, unaware that they are sworn enemies through their families' long-running feud. Their love and marriage lead to their tragic deaths, but also to reconciliation

between the two families. Their love has been held for centuries as the epitome of true love: sacrificing everything, even life itself, in its pursuit.

You, dear Sisters who have entered the novitiate and who are making your first profession of vows today, do so because you have fallen in love with the Lord and you are willing to sacrifice everything for that love. In a sense, you have found a foretaste of the joy of heaven here in the community of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George and you have discovered God's will for you here. The gripping words of your founder, Saint Francis of Assisi, resonate within your hearts: "This is what I want and what I ask: this is what I wish to do with all my heart."³ Today we share in your joy and give thanks to Almighty God for so beautiful and glorious a gift.

We thank you, as well, for the witness of your faith and of your devotion to our Crucified and Risen Lord. The world today is in great need of such a witness and will turn to you to see it. In a world obsessed with sexual pleasure, you have chosen the path of virginity; in a world obsessed with material gain, you have chosen the path of holy poverty; in a world obsessed with individual whims and wants, you have chosen the

path of obedience. Yes, my dear daughters, the world needs your witness! Strive to show the world, and to show each of us, how to follow Christ in all things with great joy and love! Show us how to “see heaven as our final goal!”⁴

Whenever I am among you, dear Sisters, I am reminded of the words spoken by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on the day of his installation as the Bishop of Rome: “The Church is alive ... the Church is young!”⁵

Your community here in Alton is young not only in age but also in spirit. This youthfulness of spirit you express in the simplicity of your lives; in the fidelity of your prayers; in the gentleness of your work; in the harmony of your songs; and in the beauty of your smiles. The youthfulness of the Church, the youthfulness of Christ, radiates forth from your community and shines as a bright beacon to all who encounter you. It is this light that has attracted and drawn your two Sisters who have today taken their First Profession and the four postulants who have been received into your Novitiate today.

For many years now, dear Sisters, you have been a bright and polished gem in this Diocese of Springfield in Illinois; let us all strive, together with the Lord’s grace, to help his light, which is refracted through

you to his glory and honor, shine brightly, drawing those far and wide to the merciful love of Jesus Christ.

As I urge you always to follow the example of our Blessed Mother, I leave you with the words of Holy Mother Clare:

What you hold, may you [always] hold.

What you do, may you [always do and never abandon.

But with swift pace, light step,

[and] unswerving feet,

so that even your steps stir up no dust,

go forward

securely, joyfully, and swiftly,

on the path of prudent happiness.⁶

As Mary set out for the hill country in haste to be of help to Elizabeth, so may each of you, dear Sisters, set out in haste toward your spiritual homeland, there to be of help to your brothers and sisters in Christ through the untiring aid of your holiness and prayers.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Introit for the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mass during the Day.

² See Preface for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

³ In Tomaso de Celano, *First Life* 1.9.22.

⁴ Collect for the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, April 24, 2005.

⁶ Saint Clare of Assisi, *The Second Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague*, 11-13. In *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap. and Ignatius C. Brady, O.F.M., trans. (New York, New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 196.