

**Mass of Thanksgiving for the Harvest
St. Agnes Church, Hillsboro**

**The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King
November 20, 2011**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The people of the United States have proudly proclaimed ever since the Declaration of Independence that they have no king. Yet, nearly every high school and college in the country has a homecoming king and queen. We also have the “King of Pop” and the “King of Swing” and even the “King of Beer.” Children play “king of the mountain” and watch “The King of Queens” and “King of the Hill” on television. While proclaiming that they have no king, many Americans seem constantly in search of one. But believers in the Catholic faith know where to find Him. Here, at the altar where bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, we remember that Christ is truly our King.

At each celebration of the Holy Mass, just before we join with the angels in singing the praise of God, we are instructed, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” After we respond, “It is right to

give him thanks and praise,” the priest recounts to the Lord of the many reasons we have to give him thanks. Depending on the particular liturgical celebration, we give thanks for the Paschal Mystery of Christ; the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary; the witness of the martyrs – such as St. Agnes - and the exemplary lives of the saints; we thank God for the protection of the angels and for the particular moments in the life of Christ commemorated through the liturgical calendar.

As we reflect on the fittingness of our thanksgiving, it is an honor to with you this morning to unite our grateful hearts in praise to God. I am especially grateful to Father Jim Neuman, the Pastor of this parish and Dean of this area, as well as to his parishioners for their gracious welcome and kind hospitality. I also thank Sr. Jane Boos, S.S.N.D. and Jim Schumacher for coordinating our celebration.

Today we give thanks to God not only for the Kingship of Jesus Christ, but also for the fruits of the harvest now brought in from the fields; we give thanks. Soon we will offer to the Lord a portion of the harvest because we know that “the earth has yielded its fruit, the Lord our God has blessed us” (Psalm 66:7-8). Even so,

today's celebration and act of thanksgiving is not simply about giving thanks for the harvest; rather, today's "symbolic offering of firstfruits of the harvest to God" is also "a reminder of the debt of gratitude owed to God for all his favors."¹

To understand what this means, we need only think of those first pilgrims who gathered for that first Thanksgiving meal on these shores. H. V. Westmeyer memorably described the circumstances of that great day: "The pilgrims made seven times more graves than huts. No American has been more impoverished than those who, nonetheless, set aside a day of thanksgiving."

Despite their sufferings and the many and great hardships they not only encountered but also endured, those early pilgrims recognized the necessity of the creature to give thanks to their Creator who has promised, "I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark... I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest" (Ezekiel 34:12-13, 15).

Even in the midst of deep agony and unfathomable misery there is still reason to give thanks, for "Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (I

Corinthians 15:20). And if Christ is raised from the dead, so, too, will we be raised from the dead to “dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come” (Psalm 23:6).

What is more, we could rightly say that only the person who regularly and sincerely gives thanks can help meet the needs of others who are suffering and are in want. Only the thankful person recognizes what he or she has been given; only the thankful person recognizes that he or she might also be in want tomorrow and therefore may also have to count on the generosity of strangers. Those to whom the Lord Jesus, the King of the Universe, will say, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited” are those who gave thanks throughout their lives and saw the need of the “least brothers” of the Lord (Matthew 25:35-36, 40).

Today, brothers and sisters, as we offer these firstfruits of the harvest to God, let us ask the Lord not only to make this harvest sustain our lives, but also to help us use this harvest for his glory and for the good of all.²

Gathered as we are around the altar of the Lord, we know that The Church's supreme act of thanksgiving for blessings received is the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice, and in the Church's liturgy of the hours this Eucharistic praise of God continues through the different parts of the day. In this way the Church teaches us to maintain and live in an attitude of gratitude to God. Therefore let us now bless the Lord, who has once again bestowed on us the fruits of the earth. Abel offered his firstfruits to God; let us also learn to share our blessings for the good of those in need, so that we may be true children of the Father, who bestows his gifts for the benefit of all the peoples of the earth.³

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Book of Blessings*, Introduction to the Order a Blessing on the Occasion of Thanksgiving for the Harvest, 1007.

² *Roman Missal*, Opening Prayer, Masses for Various Needs and Occasions: After the Harvest.

³ *Book of Blessings*, *ibid.*, 1013.