

**St. Katharine Drexel Parish – Sacred Heart Church
Springfield, Illinois**

**December 23, 2011
*Simbang Gabi***

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ draws quickly near, the joy of preparing for his coming fills our hearts so that, as we will soon pray, “he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise.”¹ On this final day of our *Simbang Gabi* celebrations, we pray “that we may celebrate with minds made pure the Nativity of our Redeemer,” for whom Saint John the Baptist came to prepare the way.²

It is this John of whom the prophet Malachi spoke when the Lord said through him: “Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me” (Malachi 3:1). From the moment of his conception in the womb of Elizabeth – and even before – John’s mission was “to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 3:24).

This prophecy of Malachi foretells not simply the coming of John the Baptist but also the two comings of the One who is greater still (cf. Mark 1:7). “And suddenly,” says Malachi, “there will come to the temple the LORD whom you seek” (Malachi 3:1). With these words, he spoke of the great annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary: “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call him Jesus” (Luke 1:31). But Malachi also spoke of the second coming of Christ when he said, “But who will endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears” (Malachi 3:2)? Whereas at his First Coming, the Lord came to us quietly and humbly, at his Second Coming he will come in his glory with his angels to judge the living and the dead (cf. Matthew 16:27).

These two comings of Christ are not unrelated, but are an answer to the prayer of the Psalmist: “Your ways, O LORD, make known to me; teach me your paths” (Psalm 25:4). By coming to us first in humility, “he guides the humble to justice, he teaches the humble his way” (Psalm 25:9) so that we may be ready to receive him when he comes in his glory.

Each year Holy Mother Church gives us the great Solemnity of Christmas so that we may remember the Birth of the Christ-Child and learn from him the way of true humility and of authentic love. We are given this season of Advent to prepare for his first coming so that we will also be ready for his second. By reflecting on the life of Saint John the Baptist, the last of the prophets, we learn how to be prepared for both comings of Christ.

The wondrous circumstances of the birth of John the Baptist foreshadow the great importance his life and mission would hold for the world. In bestowing upon him the name announced by the Archangel Gabriel, Zechariah hinted at John's mission and the fulfillment of the words of the angel: "And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth" (Luke 1:14).

We rejoice at John's birth because of the truth his name reveals; his name, says Saint Bede the Venerable, means, "God has shown favor." Yes, in John God has indeed shown favor to us by sending us the one who calls out to us, "Lift up your heads and see; your redemption is near at hand" (cf. Luke 21:28).

Traditionally, this Mass is called the *Missa de Gallo*, the Mass of the Rooster, because it is the rooster who awakens us with his call to the dawning light of day. It may still be properly called the Mass of the Rooster even as we celebrate this Mass in the evening because John has become our rooster, whose call awakens us to the dawning of him who is the Light of the World. So it is that at the end of this Mass, we will ask the Lord “that we may be ready, with lighted lamps, to meet your dearly beloved Son at his coming.”³

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Preface II of Advent, *Roman Missal*.

² Prayer over the Offerings, *ibid*.

³ Prayer after Communion, *ibid*.