

**Homily for the 175th Anniversary of St. Mary of the Assumption Parish
Sainte Marie, Illinois**

**The Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle B
July 1, 2012**

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

Father Kemme, reverend clergy, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we gather to fulfill the words of the Psalm that we have just heard: "Sing to the LORD, you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name" (Psalm 30:5)!

On this happy day we give thanks to God in this Eucharist for the many graces he has lavished upon his people here in Sainte Marie these past many years. How many children and adults have received the promise of eternal life from the waters of this font? How many people have been strengthened by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and nourished with the Lord's own Body and Blood? How many couples have been united in holy matrimony to be a mirror of Christ's love for his own Bride, the Church? How many people have been comforted and healed as they united their sufferings to those of Christ in the anointing of the sick? And how many souls have been entrusted to the loving mercy of the

Creator at the end of their earthly lives? Yes, this parish has known the favor of God and for his great kindness we give deep and heartfelt thanks to his holy name.

You know your own history well, how one hundred and seventy-five years ago Joseph Picquet and his fellow Frenchmen established the village of Sainte Marie, seeking refuge from religious persecution for his family and friends in the aftermath of the French Revolution. In choosing Our Lady of the Assumption as their heavenly intercessor for their village and parish, these early settlers chose to place themselves under the protective mantle of the Blessed Virgin Mary and have remained secure in her maternal care.

It is perhaps a curiosity of history that today the descendants of these same settlers now find themselves facing increasing threats to their religious liberty on a number of fronts from their own government. The example given us by your fathers in faith also shows us the way forward: We must also place ourselves under the protective mantle of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who, under her title of the Immaculate Conception, is also the patroness of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois and of these United States of America.

They knew, as do we, that “never was it known that anyone who fled to [her] protection, implored [her] help, or sought [her] intercession was left unaided.” In answer to her prayers, the Lord has had pity on his servants and changed their mourning into dancing (cf. Psalm 30:10-11).

As the Savior hung on the cross for our salvation, he entrusted us to his mother when he said to her, “Woman, behold your son” (John 19:26)! If we do well to follow the example of our natural mothers, how much more do we do well to follow the example of our supernatural mother? It is Mary who, reflecting on the life of her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). It is this prayerful meditation that led her to say, “Do whatever he tells you;” these same words she says to us today (John 2:5).

Throughout the course of her life Mary remained faithful to her Son and did not back away from the seven sorrows that pierced her heart. Because of her fidelity, “the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.”¹

Mary’s assumption into heaven is a clear reminder to us that “God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living” (Wisdom 1:13). For at the end of her life, the Lord said to his Mother,

“Little girl, I say to you, arise!” and Mary was taken up from the earth (Mark 5:41).

Holy Mother Church celebrates the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven, for which your parish is named, because in this exaltation of the Mother of God we see her “as the beginning and image of [the] Church’s coming perfection and a sign of sure hope and comfort to [God’s] pilgrim people.”²

The example of her life shines brightly before us and she invites us to follow her way of fidelity with the confidence that if we, too, are faithful, her Son will also say to us, “Little one, I say to you, arise!” and we, too, will share in heavenly glory.

The Assumption of Mary into heaven reminds us that this earthly life is not all-important, that when death comes it is not the end “for God formed man to be imperishable” (Wisdom 2:23). The resurrection of the dead will await us when we, too, will be raised body and soul to the glory of heaven.

When we stand before the sorrows of this life that pierce our hearts the words of Mary’s Son resound in our hearts: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28).

In today's Gospel Jesus brings back to life a child who is actually dead. On the three occasions recorded in the Gospels when Jesus raises someone from the dead, he demonstrates extraordinary compassion. Jesus raises the young man at Nain because of his pity for the widow. He raises Lazarus because he feels compassion for his two sisters. In today's story, he raises Jairus' daughter from the dead because he has compassion on her parents.

There are two aspects of compassion. We could call them the heart and the hands of compassion. Compassion means both the emotion experienced when a person is moved by the suffering of others, and also the act of entering into the suffering of another person with the purpose of relieving it. Compassion is more than a desire: it is also an act of will – a decision to become actively involved in alleviating a person's suffering.

Jesus' whole life demonstrated compassion. Jesus cured not just to prove he was God, but because he was God, abounding in love and compassion. Sinners, the sick and relatives of the dead flocked to him because he reached out to touch them.

Compassion is the emotion that links us to those outside ourselves. It enables us, it drives us, to go beyond ourselves to the beating pulse of the rest of the world. Compassion is a key dimension of what it means to be fully human, the ability to feel pain that is not our own. We might call it the divine glue of the human race. So what can you and I do to make compassion more apparent in a world where we see great suffering every day?

First, we can learn to be silent long enough to listen, to hear the cry of the other, to attend to someone else's needs. Listening is at the centre, the very core of compassion. But listening is not enough. Second, we have to be willing to remember the sharp edge of our own past sufferings. To ignore pain or to deny it or suppress it does not prepare us to respond well to what we hear from others. The third dimension of compassion is experience. To get that, we have to step outside our comfort zone – to find our way into the lives of those who suffer. Fourth, we can develop a positive approach to humanity: identifying our hopes for human community, our ideas about the will of God for all humankind and our commitment to translate compassion into action. The Church, and we as

individuals, can demonstrate God's love for the world through our own actions.

The presence of the Catholic faith in Sainte Marie these past one hundred and seventy-five years is a remarkable testimony to your faith. I am happy to join you today in giving thanks to Almighty God for the gift of your faith and pray that, following the example of Mary, you will "excel in every respect in faith, discourse, knowledge, and in the love we have for you, may you excel in this gracious act" of our Lord Jesus Christ who "destroyed death and brought life to light through the Gospel" (II Corinthians 8:7; II Timothy 1:10).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Blessed Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*, 44.

² *Roman Missal*, Preface for the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.