

**Homily for the Thirty-first Sunday of the Year - Cycle B
Diocesan Adult Education Conference
November 4, 2012**

**Decatur Convention Center and Hotel
Decatur**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, consecrated men and women, catechists and teachers, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we have gathered in faith because, as the Scriptures proclaim, “the LORD lives” (Psalm 18:47)! It is this confidence in his Resurrection that calls us to live the faith fully and to share it freely. Because Jesus, our high priest, is exalted above the heavens, we, too, are enabled to enter the Father’s glory (cf. Hebrews 7:26).

The way to enter the Father’s house is simple, although it is not always easy. What is necessary for us is to observe the commandments he has given, famously summarized in the two great commandments reiterated by Jesus: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (cf. Deuteronomy 6:1-2; Mark 12:30, 31).

Just as Moses enjoined this dual command on the people of Israel, so the Lord Jesus enjoins it on each of his disciples, on everyone entrusted with the gift of faith. You, dear catechists and teachers, share in this enjoining, in this mission of the Church, by forming both children and adults according to the law of the heart, which is love. I thank you for your devotion to this mission and for your generosity and selflessness in helping your brothers and sisters draw near to the kingdom of God (cf. Mark 12:34).

The dual commandments to love God and neighbor have great attraction for many people. But we must ask, why? What makes this summation of God's law so attractive? For some, its attractiveness lies in its conciseness, but then mistakenly use this brevity to rationalize ignoring the detailed implications of these commands. Why bother with the Ten Commandments or the one thousand, seven hundred and fifty two canons of the *Code of Canon Law* if you just need to remember these two commands? The answer is because the commands to love God and neighbor are the starting point from which all the details flow, not the end of the conversation. Love is more than a warm, fuzzy feeling. It is not enough to tell your spouse and your children that you love them, and then

just sit back and smile feeling good about that. Yes, communicating your love is important, but if you really love them, you put your feelings into action: your love is lived out in the details of your life and what you do for them to show that you truly care.

Throughout the course of this Year of Faith, each of us – you and I – will have the profound opportunity to consider how we show God in the actions of our daily lives that we truly love Him and what it is that keeps us from the kingdom of God, from following Christ Jesus completely, without counting the cost and without reserve. The scribe who questioned the Lord knew the proper answer, yet he had not yet entered the kingdom. What kept him from doing so? What keeps you and me from doing so? What keeps us from living the faith fully and sharing it freely?

For some, perhaps it is wealth; for others, perhaps an undue attachment to a material item or to another person; still for others, it may be a misunderstanding of what the Church teaches and professes to be true. As Father Barron said in his keynote address this morning, what keeps us from following Christ completely may be the mistaken notion that we can find happiness in wealth, pleasure, power or honor instead of in God.

So often we think Jesus wants to take away our freedom or to take away something that makes life beautiful and great. In reality, however, he takes nothing away; rather, he gives us everything that makes life truly great and lastingly good. He gives us Himself in the Eucharist we are about to receive; he gives us eternal life; he gives us His life!

On the day of our Baptism, our parents were questioned, "What do you ask of God's Church for your child?" Among the appropriate answers is, "Faith," to which the priest inquires, "And what does faith offer?" "Eternal life," came the response. Yes, eternal life comes from faith and faith comes from Jesus Christ.

At the heart, then, of this Year of Faith is the encounter with Jesus Christ. Indeed, in his apostolic letter announcing this year, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of "the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed light clearly on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ" (*Porta Fidei*, 2).

Each of us makes our way on this journey of faith at different speeds or paces. Some of us run swiftly along, keeping our eyes firmly fixed on the prize of eternal life. Some of us simply amble on as if this journey of faith were an airport speedway that will simply move us along without

any real effort on our part. Some of us make our way backwards and forward and back again.

At whatever pace we travel on this journey of faith, there is always room for a growth in maturity and an ever-greater “self-abandonment, in a continuous crescendo, into the hands of a love that seems to grow constantly because it has its origin in God,” as Pope Benedict put it (*Porta Fidei*, 7). This is what we call discipleship.

The word “disciple” has its roots in the word *disco* – not a genre of music from the 70s, but Latin for “I learn.” The disciple is one who learns from the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. This learning is not from dusty tomes or ancient manuscripts, but from the very person of Jesus Christ, risen and alive today, through an immediate and personal relationship with him and his Church. This relationship does not – indeed, cannot – leave a person as he or she was before. The true disciple is the one who becomes such a student of the Master that his very life conforms to the life of Christ in all things.

Unfortunately, there are many challenges in the world that sidetrack people from a willingness to become a disciple of the Lord, open to learn from Him the will of the Father and the ways in which we may live in His

love. You may have heard the statistic that the second-largest religious group in the United States is non-practicing Catholics. I am sure that many of us know personally the people and stories behind these numbers. They are our sisters and brothers, our nieces and nephews, our sons and daughters, our neighbors and co-workers.

What can we say to reignite in them the fire of faith? What is Christ inspiring us to do to proclaim the faith anew to these lost sheep? These questions lie at the heart of the Year of Faith. Of this task, the Holy Father wrote: "To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived, and prayed, and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make his own, especially in the course of this Year" (*Porta Fidei*, 9). To this end, I would like to propose a three-fold plan to make the most of this Year of Faith.

First, we must be grateful for the faith we have received, for our encounter with the Lord. Families should strive to make their homes places where the family prays together, reads the Scriptures together, and is nourished together at Sunday Mass. Families should strive to allow their faith to influence everything they do, rather than reserving their faith only for an hour or so on Sunday.

Second, we must endeavor to understand all the more clearly the faith we profess. If a friend, family member or co-worker asks us a question about Catholicism, can we provide an adequate – and correct – answer? We ought to be able to do so.

Third, we must share our faith, not only with our family and friends, but with our co-workers and everyone we meet. As the Holy Father reminds us, “Confessing with the lips indicates in turn that faith implies public testimony and commitment” (*Porta Fidei*, 10).

This three-fold plan is the way of discipleship and through it we learn to apprentice ourselves to Jesus Christ. If we follow this plan, we will draw near the kingdom of God by living the faith fully and sharing it freely.

May God give us this grace. Amen.