

**Diocesan Blessing of the Seed and Soil
St. Lawrence Church
Greenville, Illinois**

**The Fourth Sunday of Lent – Year B
March 18, 2012**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Yesterday I was talking with some friends in Chicago who were saying how much they've been enjoying this year's mild winter. I remarked that it has indeed been enjoyable, the only problem being that the farmers are concerned that the weather was too warm this winter to kill off the bugs, and the worry is that these insects who survived the mild winter will soon be munching on their budding plants. About halfway through this sentence as I was talking, I heard myself speaking and realized that I've come a long way since I grew up as an urban dweller in an apartment building without either a front yard or a back yard on the south side of Chicago! I never even mowed a lawn until I was in college! So I was amazed myself that here I was talking about farming conditions in central Illinois.

Today we have gathered in this church dedicated to the memory of Saint Lawrence to ask the Lord's blessing upon the seeds that will soon be sown in the soil of this Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. It is fitting that we do so on this day, this Fourth Sunday of Lent, situated between the Memorial of Saint Patrick – which we celebrated yesterday – and the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which we will celebrate tomorrow.

I thank Father Kaltenbach and the parishioners of St. Lawrence Parish for hosting this celebration today and extending to us their gracious hospitality. I am also grateful to Sister Jane Boos, S.S.N.D. and to Jim Schumacher for their efforts in preparing our celebration today.

These forty days of Lent take their name from the Anglo-Saxon word for “spring,” this beautiful season when the trees begin to bud again and the flowers spring up from the earth. Already this year the life of the natural world is seen abundantly around us after the death of winter. In much the same way, we are also called to shake off our spiritual death and, by God's grace, to grow ever deeper in faith, hope, and love.

Reflecting on the life and witness of the Apostle of Ireland, we prayed yesterday for the grace to proclaim God's wondrous deeds unceasingly, as Saint Patrick did among the people the Emerald Isle.¹ How fitting, then, are the words that we proclaimed in today's Responsorial Psalm, "Let my tongue be silenced, if I ever forget you" (Psalm 137:6)!

The wondrous deed of the Lord that we are ever to proclaim is stated succinctly in today by St. John the Evangelist: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16). This is the very message that is at the core of our faith. As Saint Patrick devoted himself to the conversion of the Irish people, so we should devote ourselves, first to our own continuing conversion, and then to the spiritual renewal of our families, friends, and neighbors as well. This is, after all, what this holy season of Lent is all about.

Tomorrow, reflecting on the life of the foster father of Jesus, we will pray to the Lord not only for the grace to "be worthy to minister with a pure heart" at his altar, but also that he will "graciously keep safe" his grace within us.² As Saint Joseph

devoted himself to his wife Mary and to his foster son, Jesus, so we should likewise be devoted to our families, watching over them and guarding them from all harm. In Saint Joseph, we see a man who did not mock the messengers of God, as did the people of Judah described in today's first reading, but rather a man who listened intently to them and followed their instructions (cf. II Chronicles 36:16). Because of his humble obedience, we can rightly say that his God was with him in a most intimate way (cf. II Chronicles 36:23).

Naturally, to follow in the footsteps of both Saint Patrick and Saint Joseph requires us to eat for our physical nourishment, which first requires us to plant seed in the soil. This honorable labor is a means of cooperating with God who in his work of creation "made grow every tree that was delightful to look at and good for food" (Genesis 2:9).

The Lord has given us the earth to cultivate and the seeds to sow, but it is he who, in the words of Psalm 65, "prepared the land: drenching its furrows, breaking up its clods, softening it with showers, blessing its yield. You have crowned the year with your bounty, and your paths overflow with a rich harvest" (Psalm 65:11-

12). Today we seek God's blessing upon our soil and upon our seeds that, in due time, we may reap a fruitful harvest because we are confident that "the LORD will surely grant abundance; our land will yield its increase" (Psalm 85:13).

As the earth yields its harvest for the nourishment of our bodies we will, in turn, offer the fruit of the earth and the fruit of the vine to the Lord – as we will soon do today – for the nourishment of our souls. We will ask him to accept our humble offerings of bread and wine and to give us in a marvelous exchange the Body and Blood of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason, we will soon pray over these gifts: "We place before you with joy these offerings, which bring eternal remedy, O Lord, praying that we may both faithfully revere them and present them to you, as is fitting, for the salvation of all the world."³

Through his great care for us, God wishes to feed both our physical and spiritual hunger through the fruits of the earth. And we, knowing our own weakness and limitations, are well aware that we cannot reap a great harvest through our own efforts alone. Today, then, let us together implore the Lord's mercy upon our

efforts and our sowing, “that what we know to be lacking in our labors may be supplied abundantly” by him.⁴

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Collect* for the Memorial of Saint Patrick.

² Prayer over the Offerings and Prayer after Communion for the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

³ Prayer over the Offerings of the Fourth Sunday of Lent.

⁴ *Collect* of the Masses and Prayers for Various Occasions, At Seedtime.