

**HOMILY FOR THE FUNERAL OF +JOSEPH S. PARKS**  
**Divine Providence Church, Westchester, Illinois**  
**January 6, 2012**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Joseph Stanley Paprocki was born on November 8, 1925. He was my father's younger brother, so naturally I will be referring to him as "Uncle Joe." As an adult, he changed his name legally to Joseph S. Parks for business reasons when he opened Parks Prescription Pharmacy in Berwyn. Uncle Joe went into pharmacy, as did my Dad, taking after their father, John H. Paprocki, Sr., who opened Paprocki Pharmacy in 1919 on the corner of Cermak Road and Sacramento Avenue in Chicago. The Paprocki family lived in the same apartment building where that drug store was located, as did many members of our extended family over the years.

Uncle Joe was a very dedicated person. Incredibly, he never missed a day of school in his life, including grade school, high school, college and pharmacy school! He brought that same dedication to his work. When the great snow of 1967 brought traffic to a halt, Uncle Joe walked several miles in the snow from his home in Hillside to the drug store in Berwyn. He did this not because he was worried about loss of

income if he didn't open the store, but because he was concerned about his customers who he knew would be needing their medication.

Uncle Joe was a good employer who treated his employees like family. Of course, many of them *were* family, but even those who were not were made to feel part of the family, as is evidenced by those former employees who came to the wake yesterday and the funeral today.

Parks Prescription Pharmacy burned down in 1994. I drove by the former location of the store at Cermak and Ridgeland this morning. There is now an Athletico Physical Therapy facility on that corner. I think that's a fitting tribute to Uncle Joe, since he was very athletic and kept himself in great shape throughout his life.

Uncle Joe married Lillian Kunka, the daughter of a pharmacist, and was a devoted husband to her for 62 years. Together they reared four children, Celeste, Nancy, Robert and Randall. Uncle Joe apparently got along very well with his mother-in-law, as Mrs. Kunka also worked at Parks Pharmacy for many years.

At the age of sixty, Uncle Joe took up flying. Over the years, he and Bob and I went flying on many occasions. Twice when it was just Uncle Joe and I flying in the Cessna 172 that he shared with several partners, the electrical system went out. The first time it happened, he

was very apologetic. The second time when the same thing happened, he suggested that maybe it was my fault, but I reminded him that both times we did manage to land safely!

Uncle Joe was a very cheerful person, with a ready smile and often a humorous comment or a witty wisecrack. When he came to Springfield, Illinois, for my installation as Bishop there on June 22, 2010, he said, "I didn't want to come, but they forced me." He would say such things with a straight face, so if you didn't know him, you might take that comment the wrong way, but we knew that it was his way of being funny, like to time when he feigned being obstinate and refused to get into the plane to go flying with his grandsons and Bob. When asked what was wrong, he said, "I don't like the company."

Of course, we know that wasn't true either. Uncle Joe loved his family and loved spending time with them. He was often the life of the party at family gatherings, whether it was at Granny's Picnic that his mother hosted for our whole extended family for so many years, or at our more recent incarnations of the family picnic, as could be seen in the picture that was displayed yesterday in the photo collage at the wake, where Uncle Joe had jumped up onto the picnic table in a triumphant pose!

In all of this, however, I would say that the most important feature about the life of Joseph S. Parks that we should celebrate today was his faith. He was not overly pious in outward show, but his Catholic faith was solid in his beliefs and in the way he lived his life. He was proud of being a graduate of St. Ignatius High School and contributed frequently to their alumni newsletter.

When he was in the Navy, he was given the nickname "Padre" apparently because they recognized his religious devotion. Certainly they observed that he never swore or cursed or used foul language. On the ship to Okinawa, his fellow sailors challenged him to swear, throwing down money as an incentive. He wouldn't do it.

Often when Uncle Joe and I would talk, he would have a religious question about some mystery of our faith that he was trying to resolve in his own mind. Every year he would have a list of intentions for people that he wanted me to pray for at Mass. He even had some practical suggestions for me. Once he complained that there was too much singing at Mass. He suggested to me that the "Our Father" should always be recited, since there are some people that can't sing and the Lord's Prayer should be at least the one prayer that we could always say together. From that time on, although I like to sing and chant the prayers

at Mass, I make it my practice to recite rather than sing the Our Father. Because of that, I will always remember Uncle Joe at that point of the Mass.

So it is very fitting that the very last thing that he did in his life was to be on his way to go to Mass last Sunday, which he and Aunt Lil did every Sunday right here at Divine Providence Church. He fell down the stairs on his way to church. Uncle Joe didn't make it here last Sunday, but he won't be needing to go to church any more.

The Eucharist that we are about to receive in this sacred Mass is a foretaste and promise of the heavenly banquet in God's kingdom. Who needs the foretaste and promise when you've got the real thing? I don't have the power to canonize him a saint officially - only the Pope can do that - but we can all recognize him as a saintly man, whose goal in life was to look beyond the physical life of this world to the fulfillment of our hope and the realization of our faith, namely, eternal life with our loving God in heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.