

**Homily for the Dedication of An Altar
September 12, 2012**

**St. Jude Parish
Rochester**

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

Father Probst, Deacon Walker, [consecrated men and women,] my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Saint Jude, your heavenly patron, asked at the Last Supper, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world” (John 14:22)? How is it possible that the Lord could reveal his power and majesty to the Apostles, but not to everyone?

To this question, which is surely present in the hearts of each one of us, Jesus answers mysteriously and profoundly: “If a man loves me,” he says, “he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23). Here in Rochester the Lord has allowed us to build a house for him and today we have come to dedicate this new altar to the glory of his name so that the Lord might also make his home within each of us.

It is not every day that a Bishop has this privilege of dedicating an altar so that the faithful may “worship the Father in Spirit and truth” (John 4:23). I am happy to be here with you this evening and to share in your great joy at this blessed occasion. But even as the dedication of an altar is a rare day in the life of a Bishop, even more so is it a rare day in the lives of the faithful. I thank you for joining your prayers to ours, which will soon go “up before God from the hand of the angel” (Revelation 8:4).

The dedication of an altar reminds us of the Lord’s closeness to his people. Pondering Jesus’ response to Saint Jude, Saint Augustine of Hippo said:

God is not too grand to come, he is not too fussy or shy, he is not too proud – on the contrary he is pleased to come if you do not displease him. Listen to the promise he makes. Listen to him indeed promising with pleasure, not threatening in displeasure, “We shall come to him,” he says, “I and the Father.” To the one he had earlier called his friend, the one who obeys his precepts, the keeper of his commandment, the lover of God, the lover of his neighbor, he says, “We shall come to him and make our abode with him.”¹

To be a friend of God, to keep his commandments, to love both God and neighbor; is this not what it means to worship the Father in Spirit and truth?

Jesus' promise to make his home with those who love him "means that the Risen One must be seen, must be perceived also by the heart, in a way so that God may take up his abode within us. The Lord does not appear as a thing. He desires to enter our lives, and therefore his manifestation is a manifestation that implies and presupposes an open heart. Only in this way do we see the Risen One."² The Lord Jesus manifests himself to us and not to the world in the Eucharist, and those who seek to worship the Father in Spirit and in truth will recognize his manifestation under the humble appearance of bread and wine.

Soon, dear brothers and sisters, following the example of our ancestors in faith, we will prostrate ourselves before the Lord and dedicate this altar upon which we will offer the true sacrifice of deliverance and praise: the Eucharist, Jesus Christ, the Paschal Lamb (cf. I Maccabees 4:55-56). We will take a great quantity of incense and offer it, together with our prayers, before the throne of God (cf. Revelation 8:3). Here, at this altar, the Lord will come to

make his home within those who love him, within the hearts of those who receive his Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, in faith.

In a few minutes, you will come up to receive Our Lord in Holy Communion. As you approach to receive the Blessed Sacrament, I, or one of the priests, deacons or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion will hold up the host before your eyes. What will you see? Just a wafer? A piece of bread? Or will your eyes be open to see the Body of Christ? We will then indeed proclaim, “The Body of Christ.” What will you hear? The same words that you hear so frequently that you almost don’t catch their profound significance? Or are your ears open to hear the announcement that you are in the presence of Christ your King? How will you respond? Will you mumble a perfunctory response out of habit, or will you proclaim a sincere, “Amen,” a word that means, “Yes, indeed, it’s true: I really do believe that I am receiving Christ, the Risen One, my Lord and Savior!”

In his letter, Saint Jude urges us “who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ,” to “build yourselves up on your most holy faith” (Jude 1, 20). We must build ourselves up on the Eucharist, on the Body and Blood of Christ given for us on

the Cross which we will receive from this altar. Through the reception of Holy Communion, the Lord will enter into the homes of our souls and dwell within us. This union with God is the source of authentic joy and peace and is what draws us back to the altar day after day.

The dedication of this altar is also a clear reminder to us of our need for priests, for men sent by Jesus Christ to continue his mission and ministry in every time and place. We are in need of men who, like this altar, will allow themselves to be dedicated to the service of God. We are in need of men who will stand in the person of Christ to celebrate the Eucharist, to forgive sins in his name, to heal the sick, and to shepherd the faithful on the way to heaven.

This year we have twenty-six seminarians studying to become priests; when I came to this Diocese two years ago we had eleven seminarians. The Holy Spirit is moving in the hearts and minds of the young men of this Diocese and I pray that more young men will hear his call and respond with courageous and generous love so that, through the offering of the Holy Mass at every altar in this Diocese, the Lord may continually make his home in us.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon 23.6*. In *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, Vol. IVb: John 11-21*. Thomas C. Oden, *et al*, eds. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2007), 147.

² Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience Address, October 11, 2006.