

**Homily for the Opening of Father McGivney High School
Maryville, Illinois**

**The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
August 15, 2012**

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

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, [consecrated men and women,] dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a joy for me to be here with you this evening to open Father McGivney High School. The fruits of these past few years of research and planning, selecting and structuring curricula, searching and hiring, are now finally seen. For all of your dedicated work to make this day possible, I offer my humble gratitude.

You have chosen the griffin as the mascot for Father McGivney High School, a fitting choice given the history of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. As you know, the griffin is a legendary beast from antiquity with the body of a lion and the head, wings, and talons of an eagle, going as far back as two thousand years before Christ.

The griffin was always seen as the guardian and protector of great treasures, hence it was that my predecessor, Bishop James Aloysius Griffin, decorated the Cathedral of the Immaculate

Conception with griffins guarding the Eucharist, the greatest treasure of the Church. By making use of this repeated motif throughout the Cathedral, Bishop Griffin continually directs our attention to the source and summit of all that we are and do.

Against this backdrop, we open Father McGivney High School here in the Metro East, mindful that if this new academic institution is to flourish, as we pray it will, it must be thoroughly rooted in the Eucharist. Every endeavor of this school should not only begin in the Eucharist, but also return to the Eucharist. If, in the course of studies, the students of Father McGivney do not grow in love of – and devotion to – the Eucharist we cannot deem our labors successful, despite whatever worthy academic honors and distinctions the students may achieve.

This task of helping students come to a deeper faith and understanding of the Lord's gift of himself falls primarily to you, dear parents. You accepted this mission when you presented your children for baptism and you are sending your children here so that their teachers can assist you in forming your children as disciples of the Lord Jesus. Just as the Eucharist must be the heart of this

new school, so must it also be the heart of the life of every Christian.

As we come to a deeper understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist, we became aware that we must imitate the Lord's gift of himself; as he gave himself to us, so must we give ourselves to him. To learn this way of life, the students of Father McGivney High School will naturally look to their parents and teachers; their parents and teachers must in turn look to Mary who "lifted herself up to such lofty heights of heaven that the Word reached down from the highest pinnacle of heaven and took her in."¹

Looking to Mary, we could say that she is also a type of griffin. Through her great "yes" to God's will, Mary became the new Ark of the Covenant and carried within her womb the most high God. Like her, we must also become guardians of what is entrusted to us: the divine life given us in Baptism and nourished with the Eucharist.

Like griffins, like Mary, you, the students of this new school, must seek to be guardians of the faith which lives within you and that Father McGivney High School will endeavor to deepen and explain through its various spiritual, academic, artistic, and athletic exercises.

In his 1722 work, *System of Heraldry*, Alexander Nisbet described how one might live as a guardian when he said the griffin “represents wisdom joined to fortitude, but wisdom should lead, and fortitude follow.” Fortitude is sometimes called courage and allows us to be steadfast in the face of hardships; this virtue is needed in every area of life, but it must be tempered with wisdom, otherwise it ceases to be courage and simply becomes recklessness.

We know Mary to be a woman of great fortitude as she followed her Son through his Passion. We also know her to be a woman of great wisdom who knows that the Lord “has looked with favor on his lowly servant” (Luke 1:48). With her fortitude guided by her wisdom, Mary gave herself entirely to the Lord; if we place ourselves under her maternal care she will teach us to offer ourselves entirely to the Lord, as well; she will teach us to guard the faith that is within us so that we, too, may one day be brought body and soul into the joys of heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Ambrose Autpert, *De Assumptione sanctae Mariae*, 4. In Luigi Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians*. Thomas Buffer, trans. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 50.