

**Mass at St. Joseph Home  
Springfield, Illinois**

**The Memorial of Saint Peter Damian  
February 21, 2012**

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is good to be with you to celebrate the Holy Mass again this year and I am especially grateful to the staff of St. Joseph Home for rearranging their schedule to allow us to be together today.

Just before we enter the holy season of Lent we celebrate today the life of Saint Peter Damian, a man who devoted himself to continual reform, both of the Church and of his own life. Because of this driving force of his life, he is called the Doctor of Renewal and Reform. It is fitting, then, that on this day the Apostle James says to us, “Begin to lament, to mourn, to weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection” (James 4:9).

We might at first wonder why he would say such a thing. Surely it is better to rejoice than to be sad? He says these difficult words because of the words of Jesus: “The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him” (Mark 9:31).

Throughout the forty days of Lent we keep the Passion and Death of the Lord ever before us.

We strive to keep our eyes fixed on the Cross because doing so brings about an awareness of our sins and produces within us a sincere sorrow for our sins which leads us to beg his mercy and forgiveness, which the Lord is always ready to bestow upon us. For this reason Saint James says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you” (James 4:10). As it was with Christ Jesus, so it is with us: first the cross, and then the glory of the Resurrection.

Through our Lenten penances and through an increase of prayer, fasting, alms-giving in our daily lives, we will seek to be conformed ever more closely to Christ crucified so as to share more fully in the glory and joy of his Resurrection. It was this desire that motivated the life of Saint Peter Damian.

In his sermon on the exaltation of the Holy Cross, Saint Peter Damian said,

...the cross is the death of vices, and both the fount and the life of all virtues. The cross is a footpath for those just beginning, a highway for those running, and a secure resting place for those who arrive. The cross is a gratuity for new

recruits, a castle for the knights, and a pension for the veterans. The cross is the strength of those who fight on bravely, a place of recovery for those who are staggering, and a crown for the victorious. The cross inflicts but a momentary death and then provides the compensation of eternal life. The cross deprives us of earthly things that it may enrich us with the heavenly, teaches us to hunger that we might be satisfied, instructs us in humility that it might exalt us, and bids patience that it might then crown us. The cross is the rule for those who live in Christ, the distinct standard of righteousness, and the discipline for all honest customs. The cross terrifies the devil, putting him to flight, that it may then invite the angels to approach us. It restrains our fantasies of our imagination and introduces the Holy Spirit into our chaste and pure breasts. At length, the cross refreshes the weary, invigorates the infirmed, and comforts those afflicted with the irresolution of a desperate mind.<sup>1</sup>

In the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ lies the hope of us all, regardless of our progress in the spiritual life. Each of us is, as Saint Peter Damian teaches us, in need of constant renewal and

deeper growth in faith, hope, and love. Each of us needs this coming season of Lent to learn again that, even here at St. Joseph Home, “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35).

Let each of us then give humble thanks to God for whatever cross he has seen fit for us to carry so that we might fulfill the words of the Psalmist: “Cast your care upon the Lord, and he will support you; never will he permit the just man to be disturbed” (Psalm 55:23).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Peter Damian, *The Exaltation of the Holy Cross*. In *Christian Eloquence: Contemporary Doctrinal Preaching*. C. Colt Anderson. (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2005), 115-116.