

**Mass for the Anniversary of the Young Adult Ministry  
St. Viator Chapel  
Catholic Pastoral Center**

**The Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time - Year B  
February 19, 2012**

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In June 1945 a young German soldier, a conscript into Hitler's army, was released from his prisoner-of-war camp, and made his way back home. He hitchhiked a ride with a dairy trucker, and came to Traunstein, in Bavaria, where his parents lived, and where he had been brought up. It was good to be home. He was now eighteen years old, and had spent the past two years as a soldier.

He had missed the worst of the war, but he had seen slave laborers in Munich, and he had seen Hungarian Jews being shipped off to the death camps. Now, with the horror of war behind him, the young man could return to his true vocation in life. He was not made for soldiering, and he had never wished to serve in Hitler's Third Reich. His desire was to be a priest, and now, in the summer of 1945, he could return to his studies, and to the service of God and of God's kingdom.

Sixty years later, in the spring of 2005, that young man was elected Pope Benedict XVI and now lives out God's call for him as the Bishop of Rome and Vicar of Christ on Earth. I have just returned from a trip to Rome with the Bishops of our region (Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin) for meetings with the Pope and other Vatican officials. These are periodic meetings that Bishops are expected to make every few years to report to the Holy See on the various ministries of our dioceses. This is called an "*Ad Limina*" visit because one of its primary features is a visit to the tombs of the Apostles, Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Our meeting with the Pope was an occasion for us as Bishops to renew our bonds of communion with the successor of Saint Peter, the visible sign of unity that calls all Catholics throughout the world to be one in Christ and in his Church.

Looking back on his many years as a priest and a thinker, and reflecting on the experiences of life in the world during these years, the Holy Father was moved in 2007 to write a letter, an encyclical, about the power and meaning of hope. In the face of this world's many sorrows and its destructiveness, Pope Benedict asserted the great promise of life, here and hereafter, which is to be found in Jesus Christ.

The great promise of life, the desire of every human heart, was the clear concern of the people who crowded around the house where Jesus was staying in Capernaum. The great preacher was back in town. People wanted to listen to him. What he said was inspiring. He was not preaching revolution against authorities, or the fight for greater prosperity. It was something deeper than that. He got to your heart. He made you think. He challenged you about your life now, not next week. And he had a power of healing. No wonder they came to him.

When the paralyzed man was lowered through the roof, it just showed how determined people were to get to Jesus. The sick man must have come with tremendous hope in his heart, hoping for the ability to walk again! But what a deflation of spirit it must have been, instead to hear Jesus start talking about his sins. He must have thought, it is my legs I need! But Jesus wants to show people that our legs are not all we need. To be physically independent is wonderful, but it is not everything. We belong to one another, and so we need relationships with one another; and when they break down, then we are in trouble. Then we are really paralyzed.

That is why the forgiving of sins is so important. Our wrongdoing brings hurt into human hearts, and guilt, and resentment, and hostility and bitterness. Justice seeks to restore order. Revenge only makes matters worse. Mercy is the healing balm that brings us back to life, and God is merciful. God truly loves each one of us. When Jesus speaks to the paralyzed man, he is telling him how much God loves him, how valued he is.

The message of God's merciful love for all of us is precisely the message that Pope Benedict sought to communicate in the letter about hope that I mentioned. We are not in this world simply to make the most of what we have until our life ends. Physical ills are not the only evils in this world. Just as we strive to cure disease and to improve our advances in medicine, so too we are called to recognize spiritual and moral evil, and strive to become better human beings. Our personal and social lives depend upon the values of truthfulness, justice and merciful love.

Pope Benedict has reminded us that there is a thoroughgoing purpose and meaning to our lives. God has created us and God is the goal of our life journey. For many people that bright hope of life is tragically

crushed by the brutality they experience at the hands of others. All the more reason, then, for Christian people to be examples of hope, and bringers of hope to others.

In today's first reading, the Lord announces, "In the desert I will make a way, in the wasteland, rivers" (Isaiah 43:). Even here in central Illinois we are not without our deserts, our wastelands, and here, too, the Lord will make a way and provide rivers. He will make a way for himself, for his life and grace, and he will make rivers of the living water of his very self flow. His grace gives us hope.

How many deserts there are today! At the beginning of his pontificate, our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI said:

There are so many kinds of desert. There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love. There is the desert of God's darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.<sup>1</sup>

It is from these internal deserts that the Lord wishes to prepare a way to himself and to make his waters burst forth.

One of these ways, one of these fonts of living water, is this Springfield Area Young Adult Mass, the \_\_\_\_\_ anniversary of which we celebrate this evening. I am happy to be able to celebrate this anniversary with you and I congratulate and thank you for your many efforts to bring to the Gospel and the Sacraments – which flow forth from the pierced side of Christ – to the young men and women of the Springfield area. It is your generation that has particularly experienced a variety of deserts and wastelands and it is in your generation that the Lord is particularly desirous to make new ways for himself. Through this Young Adult Mass the souls of many young people have been nourished, comforted, and healed these past several years.

We have heard today in Saint Mark's account of the healing of the paralytic how he was brought to the Lord and lowered through the roof by his friends. They knew where Jesus was and they knew their friend needed to be healed. By the strength of their faith, they knew Jesus had the power to heal him, to bring life and abundance into his desert. Because of

this confidence they would not let the crowd hinder them from bringing their friend to the Lord; they found a creative way to reach him.

My dear young adults, you, too, must find creative ways to bring your peers to the Lord. You, too, must not be afraid of the consideration of the crowd or of society. Ask the Lord to increase your faith so that you might bring your friends to Jesus and ask him for their healing and renewal. In this way, the Lord will use you to make new ways in the desert and rivers flow in the wasteland.

Here at the altar of the Lord, the internal desert begins to shrink as we are encouraged by the community of faith and nourished with the Body and Blood of the Lord. Here the Lord is continually doing something new by drawing us ever closer to himself.

It is just a few days we will enter into the sacred season of Lent, which the Lord gives to us each year to examine our lives and our commitment to following him, to examine our desire to allow him to lead us out of the desert which is the consequence of sin and its effects.

I urge you, then, to go to confession during these coming forty days. It is the sincere confession of sins and through the absolution granted that

the Lord says, "It is I, I, who wipe out, for my own sake, your offenses; your sins I remember no more" (Isaiah 43:).

In the midst of the desert we, too, sometimes grow paralyzed with fear and shame for our sins and so we stay away from the Lord, fearing his reprisal. But in the confessional we experience the tremendous depth of his merciful love and he says to us, "Rise, pick up your mat, and go home" (Mark 2:). Washed clean in the water and blood that poured forth from his side, we receive as an inheritance a place in the Father's house, our true home.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, April 24, 2005.