

**Homily for Evening Prayer for the Bishop's Gift Society Banquet
Christ the King Church, Springfield**

August 16, 2013

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

Reverend Monsignors and Fathers, Deacons, consecrated men and women, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. I am pleased to have the opportunity to be with you this evening as we kickoff another year of the Annual Catholic Services Appeal in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois.

In the business world, there are many tools that a person is expected to have in order to be effective and successful. One such tool that is very popular is known as the elevator pitch. The basic idea behind the elevator pitch is to be able to explain your business, your product, or yourself briefly in roughly the amount of time that it takes for an elevator ride. If you are able to explain yourself in that brief amount of time, it shows that your material is well-defined and that you have a good grasp on what your mission is all about.

I bring this up because it often happens that people throughout our diocese place us in a similar situation with regards to the Annual Catholic Services Appeal. They know that it comes around every year, but do not always have a good grasp on what the goal of the appeal is. And so they

ask the question: “Tell me about the work that ACSA does.” In our modern sound-bite world, they are looking for a brief, yet well-defined answer to that question.

The theme chosen for this year’s appeal helps us to answer that question in a well-defined way. The theme is three action words: “Profess, Celebrate, Witness.” These three words are three goals set by Pope Emeritus Benedict in his Apostolic Letter proclaiming the *Year of Faith* which we continue to celebrate. These actions provide the summary of what it means to live our faith. In the letter, the Holy Father writes: “To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed, and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make his own, especially in the course of this Year.”¹ One might ask the question, though: “What does this have to do with ACSA?” The response is that it has everything to do with ACSA! The Annual Catholic Services Appeal provides services which work to assist the faithful of our diocese in living out these very goals of our faith. Let us briefly consider each of these three goals and see how the services funded by the appeal support those goals.

The first goal is 'profess,' pointing to the profession of our faith. The profession of faith is a summary of what we believe as Catholics. This profession is not merely meant to be about rote memorization and then being able to say the words of the Creed from memory. We should seek to constantly grow in our understanding of the content of our faith. By growing in this understanding, we see more clearly how our faith helps to inform our view of the world and how we are to be guided along the path of truth on our pilgrimage of faith toward our home in Heaven. Many services funded by the Annual Catholic Services Appeal help to meet this need. Various areas in our Department of Catechetical Services assist the faithful at every stage in this pilgrimage of faith, from our students in our Catholic schools and religious education programs, campus ministry, adult faith formation, and ministry formation, to name a few. These services assist all of us in this first goal of being able to 'profess' our faith.

The second goal is to 'celebrate' our faith, focusing primarily in the liturgy, especially the celebration of the Eucharist. The Church speaks of the Eucharist as the "the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; ... and also the source from which all its power flows."² The

celebration of our faith in the liturgy, then, is an essential element to our identity as Catholics. This element of celebration builds upon the previous action of profession, for through our deeper understanding of our faith we come to better appreciate the saving mysteries celebrated in the liturgy. In a particular way, our Office for Worship and the Catechumenate helps to enhance our experience of the celebration of the liturgy. The Office for Vocations and the Office for the Diaconate also play a role in preparing ministers to lead us in these liturgical celebrations. These services, with others as well, help us to better 'celebrate' the gift of our faith.

Finally, we are called to 'witness' to our faith. This goal is directed toward the tangible ways in which we put our faith into practice through the witness of our lives. As the Holy Father explained in his letter: "What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end."³ Many services funded by the Annual Catholic Services Appeal aid us in being these witnesses to the faith by helping us in putting the Gospel message into practice in our lives and in our society. A

few examples include our Office for the Missions, the Office for Social Concerns and Respect for Life, and the Office for Marriage and Family Life. These services assist us in being more authentic witnesses to our faith, benefiting not only ourselves, but especially those we assist though that witness.

There are, of course, several other services funded by the Annual Catholic Services Appeal, all of which help us to fulfill the call that we heard this evening in our Scripture passage from the First Letter of Peter: to let ourselves be built up, like living stones, into a spiritual home, precious in God's eyes (1 Peter 2:4-6). In one way or another, the Annual Catholic Services Appeal supports these three goals of profession, celebration, and witness. By remembering these three words, we can very easily give our elevator pitch when asked about what the Annual Catholic Services Appeal does for our diocese. More importantly, though, it provides a framework for all of us during this *Year of Faith* and beyond to better appreciate and more authentically live this great gift of our Catholic faith.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 9.

² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 15.