

**Mass with the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

August 6, 2013

Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord

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

Dear Knights and Ladies, my brothers and sisters in Christ,

As many of you may know, I just returned last week from World Youth Day with our Holy Father, Pope Francis, in Rio de Janeiro. Joining me in Rio were thirty-four additional travellers from the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. While we were gathered together as a group for the celebration of Mass at one of the parishes in the city, I reminded the young people that their participation in World Youth Day was more than just a vacation to a foreign country, but that it was a pilgrimage of faith. The difference between the two is important. A vacation is focused on taking a break and having a joyful time away from home. A pilgrimage, while it can certainly contain these same elements, is first and foremost undertaken for a religious purpose, that of deepening our faith through a journey to a destination of religious significance. The religious purpose of World Youth Day was to better equip the young people who were in attendance to

become missionary disciples who would respond to Our Lord's command to "[g]o and make disciples of all nations!" (cf. Mt 28:19)

The Feast of the Transfiguration, which we celebrate today, provides a helpful reflection on this notion of a pilgrimage and the effects intended from participation in one. In the Gospel, as Jesus is transfigured on Mount Tabor, Peter is overwhelmed by the experience of seeing the glory of the Lord and says: "Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (Lk 9:33) He very much would have liked to have stayed with this joyful experience, but this was not the reason that Jesus had taken them up the mountain in the first place. One of the purposes was, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, "to strengthen the hearts of His disciples with a view to" His coming Passion.¹ He wanted to give them hope so as not to be scandalized when He would undergo His suffering and death. Their experience would serve as a light for the darkness that would soon follow them as they journeyed toward Jerusalem. To Peter, the trip up the mountain may have seemed to be a vacation, but for Our Lord, it was a pilgrimage meant to strengthen the faith of the Apostles for the challenging road which lie ahead for them.

This very same site of the Transfiguration continues to be a pilgrimage destination for thousands of people every year. How many people have been to the top of Mount Tabor, or one of the other many sites connected with the life of our faith in the Holy Land, and come away with a deepened appreciation of their faith and a greater desire to put their faith into practice in a more active way because of that pilgrimage experience? This is an important point for you as members of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem to be conscious of. One of your primary goals is to assist the dwindling number of Christians who live and work in the Holy Land to ensure that the Christian faith does not become a memory of the past. Closely related to that is the work that you undertake to ensure the protection of these holy sites of pilgrimage so that Christians throughout the world can continue to have the opportunity to experience these places which serve to deepen their faith. And in this way, you are making a very real and positive contribution, not just to those living in the Holy Land, but to the Universal Church. This contribution is given a special emphasis during this *Year of Faith*, which “is intended to contribute to a renewed conversion to the Lord Jesus and to the rediscovery of faith, so that the members of the Church will be credible and joy-filled witnesses

to the Risen Lord in the world of today - capable of leading those many people who are seeking it to the 'door of faith.'"² In the pastoral recommendations for the *Year of Faith* issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, pilgrimages to the Holy Land are specifically mentioned as one of the ways of achieving the goal of this rediscovery of the faith.³ May you be encouraged in the work you undertake in supporting the Holy Land, knowing the invaluable contribution that you are making in a particular way during this time of emphasis on the gift of our faith.

Our celebration of the Transfiguration of the Lord is also an opportunity for us to reflect individually on our own pilgrimage of discipleship. We have many opportunities throughout our lives to ascend the mountain of the Lord and experience a more profound experience of closeness with God. We need not travel across the world to have these experiences, but can encounter them in our daily lives, especially through our participation in the Holy Mass. We are raised up, as it were, to the heights of Heaven to join the angels and saints in giving praise to God. And although we would certainly like to stay where we are in the midst of God's glory, we know that we must return to the world in which we live to

continue our pilgrimage toward our ultimate goal of Heaven. Just as with Peter, James, and John at the Transfiguration, we come down from the mountain of God renewed and strengthened for the continuation of that journey, better prepared for whatever challenges we may encounter. Let us pray that, having received this strength, we might be more dedicated to the Christian life, a life which, as Pope-Emeritus Benedict described in his Message for Lent this past year, “consists in continuously scaling the mountain to meet God and then coming back down, bearing the love and strength drawn from him, so as to serve our brothers and sisters with God’s own love.”⁴

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ ST III, Q. 45, Art. 3, ad. 3.

² CDF, *Note with pastoral recommendations for the Year of Faith*

³ CDF, *Note*, I.2.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Message of His Holiness for Lent 2013*, 3.