

**Homily for the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of Sacred Heart Parish
November 3, 2013**

**Sacred Heart Parish
Livingston, Illinois**

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

Father Radosevich, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I am pleased to be with you today as you celebrate this important milestone of the 100th anniversary of the founding of Sacred Heart Parish here in Livingston. During the past century, the faithful of this parish have seen many changes in the world and in the Church. For example, the past one hundred years have seen 10 popes for the Universal Church, 7 bishops for this diocese, and 17 presidents in our country. We have witnessed two world wars as well as several other international conflicts. There has been remarkable progress in the areas of medicine, technology, and transportation. The Church has experienced the Second Vatican Council which brought many elements of renewal in faith throughout the world. With all of these changes, however, one thing has not changed. As we read in the Letter to the Hebrews: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8)

As we join with one another here 100 years after the founding members of this parish gathered for the first time, we rejoice in the gift of our faith in Christ Jesus that unites us and which has been at the center of this parish community. Although the ritual may look different, it is the same Mass that we attend where Christ becomes present on the altar to feed us and give us the strength that we need to persevere in living our faith each day. Although the translations may be different, the Scriptures remain the same, the living Word of God speaking to us and encouraging us on our journey. Although our circumstances and way of life may be different from our brothers and sisters from generations past, we all share the same calling to holiness in this life and eternal happiness in the next.

As we look back over the past 100 years of this parish, the readings for our Mass today direct our gaze toward the future. The liturgical year is drawing to a close and the Church takes this opportunity to remind us of the destination toward which our pilgrimage on this earth is directed. It is a reminder to us that life on this earth will eventually come to an end, a reality which none of us can escape. This reminder is not meant to scare us though, because our faith in Christ is one that is rooted in the hope of the Resurrection which has been made possible through the dying and rising

of Christ. At the same time, though, we cannot take this gift for granted and just assume that it is a given requiring no effort on our part.

Our Gospel passage today about the Lord's encounter with Zacchaeus serves as a helpful model for us in how we respond to this reality. Zacchaeus was a wealthy tax collector who was not well respected among his neighbors. It is likely that the dislike for him came from his dishonest business practices, as he himself admits, included extortion. Were he to continue on this path in his life, Zacchaeus would likely find himself in a very unhappy position at the end of his life with regards to his relationship with God.

Although many of those around him might be happy to see him suffer punishment for his injustice, Jesus has a different goal in mind. He comes to seek Zacchaeus out and enter into His house. In other words, He comes to be a part of his life. He does this not to ridicule Zacchaeus and make life difficult for him. Rather, the Lord comes to Him to touch His heart and encourage Him to turn his life around. We do not have the words that Jesus said to Zacchaeus during their meal, but we see the result of that meal. Zacchaeus was able to see the error of his ways; he repented, and resolved to amend his life. Zacchaeus had been lost but had been

saved by his encounter with Christ, an encounter which set him on a path leading toward eternal salvation as opposed to eternal punishment.

The example of Zacchaeus is one that we are invited to learn from in our lives of faith. There are many ways in which the Lord comes to us to give us encouragement and guidance. Sometimes we may find ourselves like Zacchaeus in need of repentance and conversion. The Lord will often help us to see the error of our ways, not as a way of punishing us, but as a way of inviting us to let go of those things which are holding us back from experiencing the joy and peace of sharing in a relationship with Him, a relationship which is meant to last into eternity. Mindful of His great care for us and His concern for our salvation, we are called to respond like Zacchaeus and receive His words of guidance and correction with joy, knowing that it is for the good of our souls. Then, we will be more willing to take the steps necessary to be more faithful in following His will in our lives as we set our sights on the joy of Heaven.

During this month of November, we are especially mindful of those who have gone before us, those who are already sharing in the eternal reward of Heaven, as well as those souls in Purgatory who have also earned this reward but who are undergoing their final purification so as to

enter Heaven with absolute purity. Among those who have passed from this life are our family members, friends, and neighbors who have been so important to the continued life of this parish. Although they are no longer present to us here on earth, we share a special bond in Christ Jesus that even death cannot destroy. In a very special way, each Mass highlights that communion we enjoy with the entire Body of Christ, past, present, and future. Our prayers benefit those awaiting entrance into Heaven more than we could possibly comprehend. At the same time, the prayers of those who are already in Heaven benefit us in ways that we cannot fully appreciate until we are with them ourselves.

As we continue our celebration today during this milestone of 100 years, we are mindful of the connection that we share with one another through this gift of our faith. May we be mindful also of our connection with all of those who have gone before us and marvel at the faith that continues to unite us with them in the bond of Christ's love for all of His children. We call upon all of the saints to intercede for us here in this parish that we might be fully united together in the glory of Heaven for all of eternity.

May God give us this grace. Amen.