

**Homily for the Diocesan Mission Mass
October 22, 2013**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield**

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

Reverend Fathers, consecrated religious, principals, teachers and students, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception for the annual celebration of our Diocesan Mission Mass. We gather together today to pray that the mission of the Church will continue to spread and those who dedicate their lives to this mission may be strengthened and encouraged by our support.

An important place to begin is to ask the question: what is this mission and why is it so important? If you were to look up the word “mission” in a dictionary, you might find a definition that reads similar to this: mission is “a specific task with which a person or group is charged.”¹ Sometimes, those tasks can be very simple. For example, during this time of year, many of you may have been given the mission of raking up the leaves that have fallen in your yard. This is indeed a mission, as it involves a specific task, raking leaves, with which you, and maybe your siblings,

have been charged to do by your parents. When a mission is given, it usually comes from somebody with authority over us, as in this case with your parents. Being the good children that you are, you are obedient to them and go out and begin raking.

Let us now use our understanding of mission and apply it to the Church. First of all, we can consider who has the most authority in the Church. Although you might be tempted to say the pope, the one with the most authority is Jesus Christ. He founded the Church nearly 2000 years ago and just before He was about to depart from this earth by ascending to Heaven, Jesus gave the Apostles, his closest followers, their mission. At the end of Matthew's Gospel, we hear Jesus give this command: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt 28:19-20).

The Church has the mission of continuing the work that Jesus began while He was on earth by introducing new members into the Church through Baptism and by teaching of the Gospel. The Twelve Apostles were the first ones to receive this mission and so they, like obedient children,

went out and began to do as the Lord had asked them. This mission was a very big one for them to undertake. The world is a very big place and it would take a long time to travel everywhere in order to carry out this task. It was a task that would require more effort and time than those Twelve could do in the years that they had left in their lives. The solution to that would be for them to appoint others to continue their work after they were no longer capable. We call these successors to the original Apostles bishops.

In our first reading, we see this handing on of the mission taking place. St. Paul, who had been very active in the mission of spreading the Gospel, is giving some practical advice to a young bishop by the name of Timothy. In that advice, He is reminding Timothy of the importance of preaching and teaching the message of the Gospel. He warns him that it will not always be easy and that people will not always listen to him, but he encourages Timothy not to give up and to stay committed to the mission that had been entrusted to the Church by Christ so that more and more people might have the opportunity to come to know Jesus and have the opportunity to share in the gift of salvation which He had won through His death and Resurrection.

Over time, as the mission continued to spread, more and more people became involved in the work of spreading the Gospel. Even though there were more and more bishops, the demands of the mission were too much for them to carry out this work alone. The mission of the Church, then, has been shared with others. You have probably heard stories of some of the great priests and religious missionaries who have gone to the corners of the world to make the saving message of Jesus Christ known. But even the vast numbers of priests and religious are not enough to continue the mission of the Church. In fact, Christians from every state of life have answered the call to continue this work of bringing the Good News to every place.

While the mission of the Church involves so many people, there is still need for leadership and guidance so that the work can be carried out in the way that Jesus desires. This leadership comes from the bishops, the successors to the Apostles. While it is true that Jesus Christ is ultimately the one in charge, He gave authority to the Apostles, and thus the bishops to ensure that the mission continues until He returns at the end of time. All of the bishops, therefore, continue to have a special role in ensuring that the mission continues according to the will of Christ. The bishops receive

special assistance in their role of authority from the head of the bishops, the Bishop of Rome, better known as the pope. The pope has been given this authority over the Church to be used not for his own purposes, but to ensure that the mission of the Church continues to head in the right direction.

Today, as we celebrate this mission Mass, we remember in a special way one of those popes, Blessed John Paul II, who will become a saint next April. Blessed John Paul II was very effective in his role of exercising authority over the mission of the Church. He was very active in travelling throughout the world to spread this Good News, visiting 129 countries during his nearly 27 years as pope. He was also very involved in his role as a teacher, writing on many subjects to assist the Church in growing both internally and externally. He truly was a missionary pope in every sense of the word and the Church is grateful for the impact that he has made on the Church throughout the world. As one who is blessed and soon to be a saint, we ask Him to pray for the Church that her mission might continue to be strong.

Among his many great contributions to the Church's mission was his encouragement to young people like yourselves to understand that they

too are called to be a part of the mission of the Church. In 1986, he called for the first World Youth Day, an event which would encourage young people throughout the world to be missionaries by embracing their faith and then sharing it with those around them. This tradition continues and in the most recent World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, more than 3 million young people from across the globe gathered with our current Holy Father, Pope Francis, to be reminded of their participation in the missionary call to “go and make disciples of all nations.”²

There is not one of us who is not called to share in this mission of the Church. Even though most of you are still young, you are called to contribute to the mission of the Church by praying for and assisting those who actively work as missionaries throughout the world. You will renew your commitment to this in just a moment. You also participate in this mission in your daily lives by learning more and more about your faith and then sharing that Good News with others both in word and in action. This is indeed an important work that you are called to, and as your bishop, I count on you to assist me in letting those in our diocese and throughout the world know of the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ who has suffered, died, and risen from the dead so that we, along with all of our brothers and sisters

throughout the world, might be united with Him forever in the glory of Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, *Mission*.

² Motto for World Youth Day 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.