

**Homily for the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Holy Family Parish  
Granite City**

**The Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle C  
June 30, 2013**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Father Holtman and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a curious question that Elijah asks today of Elisha: "Have I done anything to you?" The question is a curious one because the answer is obvious; the answer is a resounding, "Yes!" In the simple act of throwing his cloak over Elisha, the prophet of God appointed his successor, the one who would take up his mantle and speak to the people of Israel on behalf of God.

"Have I done anything to you?" Through his preaching and prophesying, Elijah pointed out for Elisha and for all of Israel the path on which they were to walk in fidelity with God. This, in and of itself, is a significant change in anyone's life, but to be chosen to succeed a prophet is no simple change in life. In throwing his cloak over Elisha, Elijah has completely changed his life and claimed him for the service of God and man.

From that moment forward, the task of Elijah fell to Elisha. He, too, would proclaim the words found in today's Psalm: "I set the LORD ever before me; with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed" (Psalm 16:8). Even as Elisha now set the Lord ever before him, he would have to show the people how to do the same.

Elijah rebuked Elisha and said to him, "Go back!" precisely because his chosen successor had not yet taken these words to heart (I Kings 19:20). Before taking up the prophet's mantle, he said to Elijah, "Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye and I will follow you" (I Kings 19:20). He was willing to follow the man of God, but he was not at that moment willing to set the Lord before everything else. Don't we often say something similar?

We see this encounter between Elijah and Elisha reflected in Jesus' encounter with the two disciples who were willing to follow Christ, but not before everything else. They, too, had not yet taken the words of the Psalm to heart: "I have set the LORD ever before me."

As we celebrate today the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Holy Family Parish, we do well to pause for a moment to consider the purpose, the function, the mission, of a parish. To do so, it is good to recall what the word "parish" means. It comes from the Greek word *paroikos*, meaning "sojourner" or

“foreigner.” To further illustrate what this means, let me quote from the ancient second century *Letter to Diognetus*:

Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. Their teaching is not based upon reveries inspired by the curiosity of men. Unlike some other people, they champion no purely human doctrine. With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign.

And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not expose them. They share their meals, but not their wives.

They live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh. They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven.

Though written some eighteen hundred years ago, these words have lost none of their meaning and are worthy of being rediscovered in our own day. Too many of us who bear the name of Christ have forgotten that this world is not our home; too many have forgotten that we are making our pilgrim way to heaven, our true home. It is for this reason that we must daily seek to set the Lord ever before us, ever before everything else because, as the Lord says, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

In the waters of Baptism, the Lord has thrown his cloak of the Holy Spirit upon us and as he sent messengers ahead of him so he sends each of us "to prepare for his reception" (Luke 9:52). When the Lord desires to send us out, what is our response? Are we quick to suggest something more pressing, something more urgent that needs immediate attention, or are we willing to simply put our hand to the plow and labor in the Lord's fields? This sort of discipleship is certainly not easy, but it is to this manner of life that we have been called and it is this way of life – the life of faithful

discipleship – that every parish is to foster, nourish, and sustain within the local communion of faith.

United in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, every parish truly becomes not the family left at home but the family of God called to “serve one another through love” and in so doing to arrive at the “fullness of joys in [God’s] presence, the delights at [his] right hand forever” (Galatians 5:13; Psalm 16:11).

The difficulty of the Christian life by which we unite ourselves to the Lord’s Cross have found expression here in Granite City in the various splitting and merging of parishes. First when a second parish of the Sacred Heart was formed from a portion of St. Joseph parish, and second when St. Margaret Mary Alacoque parish was formed from a portion of Sacred Heart parish. The blessings of growth always bring with the pains of separation and change by which we are reminded of our need to be attached always to the Lord.

When these expansions were consolidated together into the present Holy Family Parish it was, I am sure, no easy task, yet you have weathered this storm and have helped each other to keep the Lord ever before you. For this, I express my deep appreciation and extend my heartfelt

congratulations. As you have grown in these past twenty-five years in imitation of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I pray that through the next twenty-five years you will become one holy family “guided by the spirit” composed of many smaller holy families (Galatians 5:18).

May God give us this grace.