

**Homily for the 50th Anniversary of Christ the King Parish
Springfield, IL**

**The Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle C
August 3, 2013**

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

Father Ring, my brother priests and deacon, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is my pleasure to be with you for this celebration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of this parish of Christ the King.

The number 50 in the Scriptures is significant and its significance can help to shed some light on what this celebration means for this parish. In the Book of Leviticus, we read the command of the Lord to the Israelites regarding the 50th year: "You shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family" (Lev 25:10) This 50th year would become known as a jubilee year.

The significance of the number 50 derives from the sanctity of the Sabbath. In the biblical account of creation, God rested on the seventh day and commanded that the people of Israel keep holy the Sabbath as well. In

an agrarian culture, the land was to remain fallow every seventh year, so seven times this seven-year cycle, or forty-nine years, marks a sort of Super-Sabbath, whereby the 50th year, or year after the seventh sabbatical, was observed as the culmination of a two-year fallow.¹ In keeping with this biblical tradition, we take this opportunity after 50 years of parochial life here at Christ the King Parish to pause, to rest, and to reflect on where you as a parish have been, where you are now, and where you are going.

When we hear the word jubilee, we think of joyful celebrations with parties and other forms of entertainment. But this is not what is foremost at the heart of what was intended by God when He commanded this of His people. There is a key word that we hear in this passage from Leviticus which helps to explain this notion of jubilee. That key word is 'return.' The passage says that each person shall return to his property and return to his family. This return was meant to remind the Israelites of who they were and where they came from. Ultimately, they were the chosen people who had been freed from slavery by God's power and then given the Promised Land as an inheritance. Even if they were to fall into slavery and lose their land, the jubilee was a reminder to them to not lose hope but to trust in God's concern for them as His chosen people.

Just as significant for the jubilee year was the call to the people to restore equality among all the children of Israel by ensuring that those who were enslaved and those who were poor were taken care of. It was a reminder that all of the people, slave or free, rich or poor, shared an equal dignity.

In his Apostolic Letter on the Preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, Blessed John Paul II wrote that the prescriptions for the Jewish celebration of the jubilee years, while it sought to achieve this return to identity and equality among the people of Israel, was “more of a hope than an actual fact” and that it was more of a prophecy of the future “insofar as they foretold the freedom which would be won by the coming Messiah.”² Looking forward to this great promise was indeed a cause for rejoicing, a rejoicing that would find its fulfillment with the Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah.

This background provides a helpful reflection as you are observing your jubilee year as a parish. It is certainly a time for rejoicing and celebration, but it is also an opportunity for return in the same ways as it was for the people of Israel. It is first of all a time to return to your identity as a parish. In reading your parish mission statement, this identity is

expressed in the very first words of that statement. It begins by saying: "Loved and chosen by God, we are the Parish of Christ the King in Springfield, Illinois." This could not have been said any better given our reflection on this notion of a return to identity. We as Christians must always be conscious of the fact that we are beloved children of God and that we have been chosen for something great. Not great according to the standards of the secular world, which extol the virtues of wealth, power, influence, and success. Rather, we have been chosen to become members of the Kingdom of Heaven, a gift that will last for all eternity.

Our readings today challenge us in this regard to not place our trust and our hope in what this world has to offer. Such a striving is nothing but "vanity" as we heard in the first reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes. In the Gospel, Jesus challenges us by telling us that if we have spent our lives focusing primarily on getting ahead and growing in those things which the world tries to tell us are worth gaining, but do not give any attention to the things that matter to God, we will find ourselves in the same situation as the rich man in the parable who had nothing to show for himself at the end of his life, a reality which comes to all of us at a date and time that none of us can know. In a very real sense, we are asked to consider what we leave

behind and what will be our future. This jubilee, then, is an opportunity, as St. Paul says in the second reading, to “[t]hink of what is above, not of what is on earth” (Col 3:2), never letting the things of the world take precedence over the things of God.

Out of this awareness of who we are and what is most important in our lives flows the return to equality that is stressed in the jubilee year. A return to our identity of who we *are* as Christians then gives us the insight into what we are called to *do* as Christians. In his first encyclical, Pope Francis writes that: “[f]aith teaches us to see that every man and woman represents a blessing for me, that the light of God’s face shines on me through the faces of my brothers and sisters.”³ We are reminded of the solidarity that exists among all of humanity and how God is inviting us to show our love for Him not just in acts of worship, but also in acts of service, for in serving His people, we are serving Him who has chosen us and destined us all for salvation.⁴ This second aspect of the jubilee is expressed well in the remaining lines of your parish mission statement:

Through Baptism, we share responsibility
For continuing the mission of Jesus.
We are called to be stewards who foster and support
the gifts given to each by the Spirit.
We are sent to evangelize by making Christ visible

in our world through the Eucharist,
proclamation of the Word and service to God's people
for the salvation of all.

These words are meant to be more than just something printed on the weekly parish bulletin or on the parish website, they are words to be put into action in your life as disciples of the Lord who belong to a parish community. The first 50 years of this parish have certainly been a testament to the living out of this mission, and in this jubilee year, it is an opportunity to return to that mission once again. It is a time to celebrate the many ways in which this parish has continued the mission of Christ in assisting people to grow in their faith at various levels. It is a time to rejoice in the good that has been achieved through your willingness as faithful disciples to serve those who are in need and to promote equality. But it is also a time to reinvest in the mission and set your focus on the next 50 years, seeing how it is that this mission entrusted to you as a parish can continue to form faithful disciples, centered in the Eucharist, to go forth with ever greater zeal in seeking to give glory to God and advance further along the path of salvation for yourselves and for the whole world.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 83.

² Blessed John Paul II, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, 13.

³ Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 54.

⁴ Mt 25:31-46.