

**Homily for the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle C
February 10, 2013**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
and
St. Viator Chapel
Springfield**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This past Thursday marked the 535th anniversary of the birth of Saint Thomas More, one-time Chancellor to King Henry VIII who was executed for his witness to the truth of marriage and of religious liberty. It was he who famously died “the King’s good servant, but God’s first.”

Given the struggles of his day involving what was called the King’s Great Matter - that is, King Henry’s desire to unjustly divorce his Queen and legitimate wife, Catherine of Aragon - Saint Thomas could well have said with the Prophet Isaiah, “I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). What set Saint Thomas apart from so many of the men of his day - and especially from King Henry - was his readiness to acknowledge his sins and his desire to do penance for them. Saint Thomas knew well the Gospel he received - a Gospel that includes the truth of marriage - and, unlike King Henry and so many others, he

would neither depart from it nor alter it to suit his own interests (cf. I Corinthians 15:1).

By seeking to end his marriage to his true wife in an attempt to marry another woman, King Henry VIII sought to redefine marriage by removing the necessity of permanence. A mutual commitment between a man and a woman as husband wife until death has, from the beginning, always been part of marriage, as Jesus said when he reminded the Pharisees, “Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8). The Lord went on to say to them, “I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery” (Matthew 19:9). It was this teaching of Christ that King Henry rejected; it was this teaching of Christ that Saint Thomas accepted. It is this teaching that we, too, have received and must accept, despite the great opposition to it from powerful secular forces, if we seek to be his disciples.

Here in Illinois another such attempt to redefine marriage was made last month, and will be attempted again this week – by one great mockery – on February 14th, the memorial of Saint Valentine, if matters progress according to the wishes of the Illinois Senate President. You know already

of the efforts of the Bishops of Illinois to oppose this attempt to redefine marriage and I urge you join us by contacting your State Representative and Senator and making your voice heard. Even today the Lord continues to call out, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us" (Isaiah 6:8)? Let each of us heed his call and say, with generous and faithful love, "Here I am; send me" (Isaiah 6:8)! Like Jesus and like Saint John the Baptist, we, too, must defend the dignity of authentic marriage!

By the way, the color red is associated with St. Valentine's Day because Valentine died as a martyr. Valentine was a holy priest in Rome, who assisted the martyrs in the persecution under Claudius II. He was apprehended, and sent by the emperor to the prefect of Rome, who, on finding all his promises to make him renounce his faith ineffectual, commanded him to be beaten with clubs, and afterwards, to be beheaded. He was executed on February 14, about the year 270. So instead of celebrating some sort of syrupy sentimentality, I suggest that St. Valentine's Day focus more on the sacrifices that true love demands of us.

Those who insist on this redefinition of marriage claim to do so out of love. They ask, should anyone be denied the right to love another person?

The answer, of course, is no, provided that we have a true definition of love. Let us consider, then, what love is.

Certainly, love is a feeling that we experience, an emotion, but it is also much more than a mere sentiment. Emotions come and go, like the waxing and waning of the moon, and sometimes they deceive us. Sometimes we perceive we have been slighted by someone when no slight was actually done to us. Other times we grow angry with a friend or family member and, while we may feel anger towards them and not necessarily affection, it does not mean that our love for them has ceased.

More than simply an emotion, love is a choice for the good of another person. Love is also the desire to act so as to obtain the good for another person. Love, then, is not so much an emotion as it is an act of the will; love is a choice; it is a decision to act in a certain way, not simply a feeling over which we have no control.

We know that what is good is not sinful and what is sinful is not good. Authentic love, then, never encourages sin or leads a person further into sin, but seeks instead to help him live a holy life. Love seeks to lead her further away from sin and closer to the truth. We also know that the truth is not a thing, but a person. Christ Jesus tells us, "I am the way and

the truth and the life” (John 14:6). The one who truly loves seeks always to lead the one who is loved always closer to Jesus Christ, to him who is not only the Good Shepherd but is, as Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches us, Goodness itself (cf. John 10:11).

Parents know that when they raise their children and teach them the ways of love that “love both elicits virtue and expels vice, not permitting it to spring up at all.”¹ If vice is not expelled but instead encouraged and fostered, then a person lives more in sin than in love and their salvation is at risk. This is why Saint John Chrysostom declared, “In other words, says Paul, if I have no love I am not just useless but a positive nuisance.”²

Love, then, does not tolerate sinful desires and activities but seeks to root them out because “it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth” (I Corinthians 13:6). The Venerable Fulton J. Sheen put it this way:

Christian love bears evil, but it does not tolerate it.

It does penance for the sins of others, but it is not broadminded about sin.

The cry for tolerance never induces it to quench its hatred of the evil philosophies that have entered into contest with the Truth.

It forgives the sinner, and it hates the sin; it is unmerciful to the error in his mind.

The sinner it will always take back into the bosom of the Mystical Body; but his lie will never be taken into the treasury of His Wisdom.

Real love involves real hatred: whoever has lost the power of moral indignation and the urge to drive the buyers and sellers from the temples has also lost a living, fervent love of Truth.

Charity, then, is not a mild philosophy of "live and let live"; it is not a species of sloppy sentiment.

Charity is the infusion of the Spirit of God, which makes us love the beautiful and hate the morally ugly.

When the Church teaches and proclaims what is moral and what is immoral, what is holy and what is sinful, what is right and what is wrong, what is just and what is unjust, she is met with opposition; evil never likes to be called out for what is. Yet in the face of such opposition, the Church continues to speak the truth because "love endures all things" because she does not teach her mere opinion, but the truth she has received from Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 13:7). Because it comes from the Lord and not from

men, the Church can neither depart from the Gospel nor alter it to suit modern desires.

When the Lord called Saint Peter to follow him, the fisherman from Galilee “accepted this surprising call; he let himself be involved in this great adventure: he was generous; he recognized his limits but believed in the one who was calling him and followed the dream of his heart. He said ‘yes,’ a courageous and generous ‘yes,’ and became a disciple of Jesus.”³

Saint Thomas More heard this call and also gave a courageous and generous “yes,” and though they both met their deaths because of their fidelity to Christ, because of their love of the Truth, they also found the lasting joy and happiness promised to everyone in Christ. This same call is given to each of us, the call to follow the Lord with courage and generosity.⁴

In his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* (The Door of Faith), by which he began this Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that “the renewal of the Church is also achieved through the witness offered by lives of believers: by their very existence in the world, Christians are called to radiate the word of truth that the Lord Jesus has left us.”⁵ If you and I strive for the greatest spiritual gift, the gift of love, and seek to share that

love in everything we do by acting for the good of others, not only will the Church be renewed, but the world as well.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 33.3. In *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament Vol. VII: 1-2 Corinthians*. Thomas C. Oden, *et al*, eds. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 130.

² Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, 32.6. In *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament Vol. VII: 1-2 Corinthians*. Thomas C. Oden, *et al*, eds. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1999), 128.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience Address, May 17, 2006.

⁴ cf. Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience Address, May 17, 2006.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 6.