

**Homily for the Memorial Mass for the Reverend Victor J. Kaltenbach
St. Lawrence Church
Greenville**

January 29, 2013

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I have come here tonight as your Bishop to offer this Memorial Mass for the repose of the soul of Father Victor Kaltenbach, who served for many years as your Pastor and who faithfully collaborated with me and my predecessors in the pastoral ministry. I presided at his funeral Mass last week at St. Brigid Church in Liberty. I am here tonight not only to offer my condolences to you on the loss of the priest whom you called your spiritual “father” for so many years, but to pray for Father Kaltenbach himself. Why? Why does the Church believe in praying for the dead? We can learn the answer to that question from the example of two great saints, Saint Monica and her son, Saint Augustine.

As she neared her death, Saint Monica comforted her son as she gave her final request. She said to him, “Bury my body anywhere you like. Let no anxiety about that disturb you. I have only one request to make of you,

that you remember me at the altar of the Lord, wherever you may be.”¹

Saint Augustine knew that his mother had lived her life in such a way that the name of the Lord “is praised in her faith and behavior” and by this knowledge he was comforted.²

Yet even with this confidence in the goodness of his mother’s life, the great Bishop of Hippo wrote in his *Confessions*:

Therefore, God of my heart, my praise and my life, I set aside for a moment her good actions for which I rejoice and give you thanks. I now petition you for my mother’s sins. “Hear me” (Psalm 142:1) through the remedy for our wounds who hung upon the wood and sits at your right hand to intercede for us (Romans 8:34). I know that she acted mercifully and from her heart forgave the debts of her debtors (Matthew 6:12; 18:35). Now please forgive her her debts if she contracted any during the many years that passed after she received the water of salvation. Forgive, Lord, forgive, I beseech you. “Enter not into judgment” with her (Psalm 142:2). Let mercy triumph over justice (James 2:13), for your words are true, and you have promised mercy to the merciful (Matthew 5:7).³

The holy Bishop lovingly offered the sacrifice of the Mass, the remedy of our sins, for the repose of his mother's soul, and he prayed that the readers of his *Confessions* would do the same with "devout affection."⁴ He made this prayer "with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness" (II Maccabees 12:45).

The ancient Fathers of the Church, those members of the Christian faithful who lived in the first centuries after the Resurrection of the Lord, were confident that "the sacrifice of Christ in the liturgy ... brings clemency to the deceased so that the souls of the dead might be refreshed."⁵ It is this same confidence, this same "holy and pious thought" that has brought us here today to remember Father Victor Kaltenbach at the altar of the Lord where he celebrated Mass for you so very often and where we will soon offer the Eucharistic sacrifice for the repose of his soul (II Maccabees 12:45).

This prayer for the dead is counted among the spiritual works of mercy. It is good that we gather together to pray that Father Kaltenbach might be freed from his sins because "our prayer for [him] is capable not only of helping [him], but also of making [his] intercession for us effective" (II Maccabees 12:46).⁶

We know that each of us commits many venial sins every day that we do not confess, either because – strictly speaking – there is no need to confess them or because we simply forget about them. While these venial sins do not exclude us from the glory of heaven, they, too, must be atoned for before we can see God as he is (cf. I John 3:2).

Over the years, you, his dear and beloved parishioners, have shown many kindness to Father Kaltenbach. For these and for the love you have shared with him as he lived among you and ministered to you these past nineteen years, I offer my heartfelt gratitude. My God reward you and bless you with continued growth in the virtues of faith, hope, and love!

At the very mention of the name of Father Victor Kaltenbach, his bright and beaming smile come to mind. Indeed, it is his smile that so many people remember with such fondness. Through his smile, he made known the love of Jesus Christ, who desires each of us to be with him (cf. John 17:24). Even in his last days, as his health failed Father Kaltenbach was certain of the Lord's love for him; because he wanted to be with the Lord, his smile remained.

The Psalms describe the goal of our lives as a quest to seek the face of God (cf. Psalm 42:3). We use the expression when we receive the benefit of some good grace, “God is smiling on us.”

When Aaron blessed the people of God in ancient times, the High Priest of Israel prayed, “The Lord make his face shine upon and be gracious to you” (Numbers 6:26).

Today, in this memorial Mass, we ask the Lord to grant to Father Kaltenbach, with his sins forgiven, the heavenly bliss of gazing eternally upon the face of God. May Father Kaltenbach smile this day at the Lord, and may Lord smile upon Father Kaltenbach.

May God give us this grace.

¹ In Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, XI.27.

² Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, XI.34.

³ Saint of Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, XI.35.

⁴ Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, XI.37.

⁵ Christian D. Washburn, “The Value of Offering Sacrifice for the Dead in the Thought of the Fathers of the Church,” *Antiphon: A Journal for Liturgical Renewal* (16:3), 170.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 958.