

**Homily for the National Catholic Development Conference
Grapevine, Texas**

**The Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year C
September 14, 2013**

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

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, consecrated men and women, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for me to be with you here at the conclusion of our annual convention for the National Catholic Development Conference. As your Episcopal Advisor, I would like to extend my gratitude on behalf of my brother bishops for the important work that you do in assisting organizations to raise money to continue the apostolic mission of the Church entrusted to us by Jesus Christ.

It is very fitting that our time together concludes with this Eucharistic celebration. The Church speaks of the Eucharist as being the “source and summit of the Christian life,”¹ and so as we reach the summit of this conference, it only seems right for it to conclude in this way. One of the terms that we use most frequently for this celebration is the Holy Mass. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that this is one of the names for the Eucharistic celebration “because the liturgy in which the mystery of

salvation is accomplished concludes with the sending forth (*missio*) of the faithful, so that they may fulfill God's will in their daily lives."² This Mass, then, serves as a reminder to all of you that you are now being sent out, having received a wealth of information and resources to be more effective in your work. More importantly, you are about to receive the grace of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the most effective resource that we have, because it helps you to not lose sight of the underlying reason for the work that you do, namely, to assist those organizations which work within the Church to spread the Good News of the Gospel in word and action. Our faith, nourished at the altar, will aid you in more faithfully using those resources gained during this conference to help support that mission.

In addition to the grace you will receive, the readings provided for this Mass offer a helpful reflection on the perspective we are called to have when undertaking this work of fundraising and stewardship. In the Gospel we just heard from St. Luke, we have three familiar parables which speak of things and people being lost and found. The first two parables are very similar as they show the effort taken by the shepherd and the woman to recover their lost items. They are both very concerned that they not lose anything of what they have, going the extra mile to ensure that everything

is accounted for. In the financial world, these are the type of people we would want working with our money, ensuring that none of it goes to waste and that it is taken care of properly. In the beginning of the third parable, we see how the younger son is not a good steward of those resources that had been given to him. He does not plan well and “squandered his inheritance” (Lk 15:13). This is definitely not the type of person we want working with our money, as they approach it with a careless attitude which is only focused on the here and now, without concern for the future.

While we can draw some valuable lessons about the good management of money and resources from these parables, that is not the primary reason that Jesus gave them to us. In a similar way, if the only thing we walk away with from this week is a set of techniques and tools for raising money, then we miss something very valuable. The overarching theme of these parables is about God’s mercy and His desire for the well-being of the souls of His people. The one sheep and the one coin both represent just how valuable each and every soul is to God and how He will do whatever it takes to ensure that they are not lost. This is brought out clearly in the third parable of the prodigal son, when we see the reaction of

the father as he joyfully welcomes back his son who had wandered away and wasted the gifts that he had given to him. Christ is not so concerned about losing animals and coins; He is concerned primarily about souls and His desire for them to be with Him for eternity.

Why is this message important to us in the area of fundraising, stewardship, and development? Some wrongly think that the care of souls belongs just to the clergy and consecrated religious. The Second Vatican Council, which the Church has encouraged us to revisit during this Year of Faith, makes clear that all of the faithful share in this mission. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church we read:

Upon all the laity, therefore, rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all men of each epoch and in every land. Consequently, may every opportunity be given them so that, according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church.³

Everybody, then, has some role to play in working for the salvation of souls, including fundraising, stewardship and development. That connection may not always seem so clear to us. We can easily become so focused on the dollars and cents of the business and lose sight of the

underlying meaning of our work. But it is something of which we should constantly remind ourselves, so that we might draw encouragement from knowing that what we are doing has an impact on something greater. Once again, we see the wisdom of finishing this convention in the context of our faith so that we might keep that proper perspective as we are sent back out to our everyday lives.

Your continued awareness of your participation in this saving mission of Christ and His Church is contingent upon the growth of your own faith. It is therefore necessary that you not neglect those resources and tools offered to us by our faith. While practices such as receiving the sacraments, daily prayer, the Rosary, and reading the Scriptures may seem initially unrelated to the tools we have for fundraising and development, they are in fact very much essential in keeping our priorities straight. They will help us to purify our intentions so that all of our work might be seen as connected to the mission of the Church and never separate from it. These practices will also help us to step away from those activities and attitudes which are not in alignment with that mission, enabling us to be the very best stewards possible of what God has entrusted to us in seeking to build His Kingdom.

As we prepare to receive the gift of the Eucharist and to be sent out to continue our participation on that mission, let us thank the Lord for the opportunity that He has given to us to be involved in this very important work. May we all take some time to reflect as we head home on how the information and resources that we have received this week, along with the tools of our faith, will assist you, not only in how to raise more money, but also to use those tools to better support the Church and her work of seeking to draw souls to Christ. By following this path throughout our lives, we will merit to hear those consoling words that we all hope to hear as a result of our efforts in the service of His Kingdom: “Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your master” (Mt 25:23).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Lumen Genitum*, 11

² CCC 1332

³ *Lumen Genitum*, 33