

**Homily for a Parish Visit to  
Saint Sebastian Parish, Waverly**

**29<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year - Cycle C  
October 19, 2013**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

As Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, it is a privilege for me to celebrate and preach at this Mass with you today. Usually when a bishop comes to a parish, it is a special occasion, like administering the Sacrament of Confirmation or celebrating a parish jubilee. I am not here for any of those reasons today. I am here for a regular Sunday Mass because I want at some time to visit every parish in our diocese, in order to get to know the people and the places that make up our Catholic community in central Illinois.

What does a bishop look for when he comes to a parish? Well, I didn't come to see if the floors were cleaned and the pews were polished! Though I must say, your church looks very nice! I take my cue from the Gospel passage where Jesus asks, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

First and foremost, when a bishop comes to a parish, he looks for the presence of the Catholic **faith**, to see whether it is strong and vibrant, whether it is growing, and if the conditions are present for its continued growth in the future. So it is good to see people of faith gathered here.

At the same time, a pastoral visit is not just a time for a bishop to see the parish, but also for the parish to see the bishop. The Church is all about relationships. As the three persons of the Trinity are an intimate communion of Father, Son and Spirit in relationship to each other, the Church exists as a communion in relationship to God and in relation to each other, the People of God, the Body of Christ. As a bishop, I have a special relationship with you, and you have a special relationship with me, and one of my roles is to bridge the relationship between you and the Pope and the rest of the universal Church, so that we may all be one in Christ's Body, into which we have been incorporated by the grace of Baptism.

In 1926, Pope Pius XI established World Mission Sunday, which was "to be celebrated on the same day in every Catholic diocese, parish and institute in the world." As we celebrate World Mission Sunday today, Jesus challenges us to remember the just needs of those who are poor and defenseless, who often face injustice and hardship.

Today's Gospel passage tells of a poor widow who needed justice in an unjust situation. Reasonably, she approached a judge in her search for a fair verdict. Unfortunately, the judge whom she tackled had no intention of serving the cause of justice. Perhaps if she had been able to offer a bribe or social advancement, the story might have been different. Instead, she was poor, a widow, and had nobody to fight her battles on her behalf. The only weapon in the widow's armory was persistence – which she used to great effect. Morning, noon and night, she plagued the unjust judge, giving him no peace and quiet. He soon tired of the constant pestering. Driven, not by concerns for justice, but solely by a desire to be rid of her, he gave the widow the verdict she deserved. There is a saying that “whoever thinks little ones have no power has never been to bed with a mosquito!” The widow was such a mosquito.

In years past, missionaries travelled to uncharted places, encountered previously unknown peoples and languages, and built flourishing mission stations, schools and hospitals. St. Francis Xavier spoke of his arm aching because of the number of baptisms he performed in a single day. Today, missionaries are rarely “explorers in the cause of the Gospel,” because the world has become a global village. Today, missionaries, both at home and

abroad, play a vital role in advocacy for those who are oppressed and marginalized.

On World Mission Sunday, unlike the unjust judge of the Gospel, the Church unites in a global outreach to those who are overlooked by the world around them. The Church sponsors schools, hospitals and clinics. The urgent needs of parishes, seminaries and dioceses, especially in the developing world, continue to call upon our resources. More importantly, missionaries continue assure people that hope, faith, justice, life and love are not reserved for a select few. Our mission is to tell each and every man, woman and child that they are precious and honored in God's sight. We have no more important task than to be messengers of our God to a world that is so desperately in need of love.

The message of today's Gospel calls us to examine our own consciences as we enter the last month of the "Year of Faith" proclaimed by Pope Benedict XVI. At the heart of this Year of Faith is the personal encounter with the triune God. Indeed, in his apostolic letter announcing this year, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of "the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed clearly light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ" (*Porta Fidei*, 2).

Unfortunately, not everyone shares in our joy and enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ. You may have heard the statistic that the second-largest religious group in the United States is non-practicing Catholics. I am sure that many of us know personally the people and stories behind these numbers. They are our sisters and brothers, our nieces and nephews, our sons and daughters, our neighbors and co-workers.

What can we say to reignite in them the fire of faith, to call them back to the promises made and received in Baptism? What is Christ inspiring us to do to proclaim the faith anew to these lost sheep? These questions lie at the heart of the Year of Faith. Of this task, Benedict XVI wrote: “To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived, and prayed, and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make his own, especially in the course of this Year” (*Porta Fidei*, 9). To this end, I would like to propose to a three-fold plan.

First, we must be grateful for the faith we have received, for our encounter with the Lord. Families should strive to make their homes places where the family prays together, reads the Scriptures together, and is nourished together at Sunday Mass. Families should strive to allow their

faith to influence everything they do, rather than reserving their faith only for an hour or so on Sunday.

Second, we must endeavor to understand all the more clearly the faith we profess. If a friend, family member or co-worker asks us a question about Catholicism, can we provide an adequate – and correct – answer? We ought to be able to do so.

Third, we must share our faith, not only with our family and friends, but with our co-workers and everyone we meet. As the Pope Emeritus reminded us, “Confessing with the lips indicates in turn that faith implies public testimony and commitment” (*Porta Fidei*, 10). Through this testimony and commitment, we invite others into a relationship with the God who is both three and one.

This three-fold plan is the way of discipleship and through it we learn to follow Jesus Christ, to live ever more fully the grace of Baptism.

As we approach Christ in holy communion at this and at every Mass, may our gathering around this altar and our celebration of the Eucharist always fill us with an awareness of the grace and peace that comes to us from God our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.

May God give us this grace. Amen.