

**Homily for a Parish Visit to
St. Fidelis Parish
Arenzville**

**The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity
May 26, 2013**

**† Most Rev. Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Father Brey, 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, celebrating a parish jubilee, or installing a new pastor.

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! 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.

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 – which we celebrate today in a particular way – 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.

But this “special relationship” brought about in the saving waters of baptism is not just about recognizing each other's faces and knowing one another's names and titles. In the Church, we call this relationship a *communio*, that is, the communion of those belonging to the Body of Christ, the Church, which the Second Vatican Council, in the Dogmatic

Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (14), describes as follows: “Fully incorporated into the Church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who – by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesial government, and communities – are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops.” Thus, to remain in this authentic *communio*, we can never see ourselves as somehow “independent,” nor can we act apart from the universal Church or even the local Church, or else we cease to be truly Catholic.

As we celebrate today the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity it is fitting for us to consider, for a moment, our own Baptism in which we received a share in the divine life. On the day of our Baptism, our parents - or, if we were adults, we ourselves - were asked, “What do you ask of God’s Church for your child?” Among the appropriate answers is, “Faith,” to which the priest asked “And what does faith offer?” “Eternal life,” came the response. Yes, eternal life comes from faith and faith comes from Jesus Christ.

At the heart, then, of this Year of Faith is the personal encounter with 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).

Each of us makes our way on this journey of faith at different speeds or paces. Some of us run swiftly along, keeping our eyes firmly fixed on the prize of eternal life. Some of us simply amble on as if this journey of faith were an airport speedway that will simply move us along without any real effort on our part. Some of us make our backwards and forward and back again.

At whatever pace we travel on this journey of faith, there is always room for a growth in maturity and an ever-greater “self-abandonment, in a continuous crescendo, into the hands of a love that seems to grow constantly because it has its origin in God” (*Porta Fidei*, 7). Baptism calls us to a continuing and ever-present self-abandonment to the will of the Lord; this is what we call discipleship.

The word “disciple” has its roots in the word *disco* – not a genre of music from the 70s, but Latin for “I learn.” The disciple is one who learns

from the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. This learning is not from dusty tomes or ancient manuscripts, but from the very person of Jesus Christ, risen and alive today, through an immediate and personal relationship with him and his Church. This relationship does not - indeed, cannot - leave a person as he or she was before. The true disciple is the one who becomes such a student of the Master that his very life conforms to the life of Christ in all things. In the waters of Baptism, we have died and risen with Christ; we share in his life and so our lives must now reflect his; when people look at us, at followers of Christ, they should be able to see the love of Jesus shining through our words and deeds.

To our sorrow, today there seem to be fewer and fewer people willing to apprentice themselves to Christ, to learn from him the will of the Father and the ways in which we may live in his love. You have heard the statistic, no doubt, 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 a three-fold plan to make the most of this Year of Faith.

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 apprentice ourselves to 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.