

**Homily for the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Village of Teutopolis  
17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A  
July 26, 2014**

**Society Hall Ball Diamond  
Teutopolis, Illinois**

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

Reverend Fathers, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good for us to be here as we begin this week-long celebration of the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Village of Teutopolis. It is fitting that our celebration of this historic milestone should begin by giving thanks and praise to Almighty God, recognizing that every good gift that we have received individually and collectively as a community comes from His abundant generosity.

In our Gospel for today's Mass, Jesus continues to communicate His teaching to His followers in the form of parables. The parables today focus on the Kingdom of Heaven which He compares to a "treasure buried in a field" and a "pearl of great price" (cf. Matthew 13:44-46). This great treasure is the goal toward which all Christians are called to direct their lives, putting aside all of the obstacles that could hinder them in attaining this precious gift.

This teaching about the importance of the Kingdom of Heaven represents the fulfillment of all that had been written previously in the Law and the Prophets. This is indicated in the words which Jesus speaks at the conclusion of the Gospel where He says that “every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his storeroom both the new and the old” (Matthew 13:52). One comes to a full appreciation of His teaching only in light of all that has been written in preparation for its coming. Jesus is inviting His listeners to recognize the value of the continuity of the old with the new, as opposed to seeing the old as something just to be thrown out in order to be replaced with that which is new and unique.

This theme of the old and the new coming together to form a rich totality applies very well to the celebrations to take place throughout the coming week. Events and activities that are both current and historical will demonstrate that the Village of Teutopolis is best appreciated not just by looking at where we are now, but by seeing how all that has come before has defined and shaped the community in a profound and meaningful way.

The theme for this anniversary commemoration celebrates three areas that are of particular importance to this town: faith, family, and community. Our understanding of the significance of each of these elements is aided by being conscious of the connection that exists between that which is old and that which is new in the history of Teutopolis.

In reviewing some of the history of this village, it is evident that there is a strong appreciation for the history of this community. Many of the articles reflect on the various businesses, industries, and institutions that have been a part of the day to day life of residents for the past 175 years. Such awareness reflects a community that is proud of all of those people, places, and events that define the unique and special identity of this village.

A significant part of this unique identity is to be found in the families that make up the community. I have often heard people comment on how the families of this area are one of the defining characteristics that make the Village of Teutopolis so special. There is a great awareness for how many of these families have been around for a very long time and have contributed in significant ways to the prosperity of the community. People joke everybody living here is related to each another! Even if these jokes

are not true, there is certainly the feeling that the love of family permeates the entire community to the point that there is a great harmony that exists among the people here and that each person is respected and treated as being a part of one large family.

The element that is most foundational to the identity of the Village of Teutopolis, however, is the Catholic faith. Our Mass here as the kickoff event for the whole week is but one example of how the faith is at the center of this community. This is due in large part to the presence of the Franciscan Friars who have been ministering to the faithful of this community for more than 150 years. In the introductory essay of the book commemorating this anniversary, Mr. Rick Siemer wrote that the early people of Teutopolis struggled, not being able to “hit their stride as a genuine community.” What changed that was the arrival of the Franciscans who have brought them together as the family of God.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the Franciscan Friars, the work of other religious orders, especially the School Sisters of Notre Dame, has had a deep impact on the faith life of this community, particularly in the area of religious education. Teutopolis is among a very small minority where the public school system is able to include religious education before the beginning of

the school day. Other members of the Franciscan family have helped to shape and guide the faith of this community, including the Third Order Secular Franciscans, who are celebrating 150 years in Teutopolis this year. One cannot adequately speak of how faith has been central to this community without mentioning the Knights of Columbus who have been a very visible and active part of the life of this village for 70 years.

The Catholic faith has remained the same throughout the history of this village. The same truths that guided the early settlers to build the community, to persevere in the midst of challenges, and to rejoice in the blessings received, are those same truths that continue to guide this community today. From its very beginning, this community has understood that it was united together in the Body of Christ, and the members of this community reflect that belief in their concern for one another and their willingness to come to the aid of each person, seeing each as a brother or sister in Christ.

In a society in which there are forces that continue to chip away at the religious foundations of our communities and families, it is important for you as a community to hold fast to your Catholic faith, remaining firmly rooted in that which is old and unchanging, so that it might shed light on

the new situations that you will all face together. This faith truly is the “pearl of great price” that is worth safeguarding above anything else in your lives both individually and as a community. As the early settlers found their identity through the faith, so too will the identity of Teutopolis continue to be strong through that Catholic faith which has been such a gift. I urge you never to let any obstacle stand in the way of your faith as you continue to move forward, toward the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. There, we all hope to be united with one another in the one family of God for all of eternity.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Siemer, Rick, “Teutopolis at 175”, *Teutopolis Terquasquicentennial*, v.