

**Homily for the Mass of Easter Sunday
April 19, 2014**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

When I was growing up, Sundays in the Paprocki household had a very different feel from the rest of the week. After my parents, my siblings and I went to morning Mass together, we would come home to a big breakfast. It was not the usual bowl of cereal and juice eaten hurriedly before rushing off to school, but a sumptuous delight of eggs and bacon cooked by my father. The fact that Dad made breakfast was different in that Mom did the cooking during the rest of the week, since my father was always tending to the pharmacy that our family owned and operated.

After relaxing, reading the Sunday newspapers and perhaps watching a sporting event on television (baseball, football or hockey depending on the season), we would gather again for a big family dinner. After dinner on Sunday afternoons, very frequently our whole family would drive to Resurrection Cemetery in Justice, Illinois, where most of my

deceased relatives are buried. We had a regular route of visits around the cemetery: first, near the cemetery entrance, we would stop at the grave of my grandfather, John H. Paprocki, Sr. Then we would visit the tombs of my mother's parents, Leo and Amanda Bonat. The last stop before leaving the cemetery was the Gorski plot, which was the family of my Dad's mother. She was from a large family which included her brother, Father Aloysius Gorski, who was the only other priest in my family, as far as I know. At each grave we would say an "Our Father" and a "Hail Mary" and pray for their eternal rest.

I learned some very important matters of faith from these customs: first, Sundays were different because every Sunday was a celebration of our Lord's resurrection; second, Sundays were a day of rest in observance of the Third Commandment to keep holy the Sabbath; third, spending time with family was important in keeping with the Fourth Commandment to honor father and mother; and fourth, visiting the cemetery to pray for the dead was a sign that we believed in the resurrection of all the dead on the last day when Our Lord returns for the Last Judgment at His Second Coming.

This last truth of our faith, the “resurrection of the body” (as we say in the Apostles’ Creed) or the “resurrection of the dead” (as we say in the Nicene Creed), is the reason why Christian burial of the body is preferred by the Church over cremation. When the *Code of Canon Law* was revised in 1983, cremation, which had previously been forbidden, was prohibited only to “those who chose the cremation of their bodies for reasons contrary to the Catholic faith (canon 1184). An example of a “reason contrary to the Catholic faith” would be those who choose cremation as a way to manifest unbelief in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.

The Appendix on Cremation in the *Order of Christian Funerals* states: “Although cremation is now permitted by the Church, it does not enjoy the same value as burial of the body. The Church clearly prefers and urges that the body of the deceased be present for the funeral rites, since the presence of the human body better expresses the values which the Church affirms in those rites” (no. 413). The Appendix on Cremation goes on to state that the “cremated remains should be buried in a grave or entombed in a mausoleum or columbarium. The practice of scattering cremated remains on the sea, from the air, or on the ground, or keeping cremated remains in

the home of a relative or friend of the deceased, is not the reverent disposition that the Church requires (no. 417).”

Although those who choose cremation usually do so for economic or environmental reasons and rarely as an explicit way to manifest unbelief in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, there may be an implicit lack of appreciation for the significance of this teaching. Scattering ashes in particular conveys a message contrary to this belief in that it seems to communicate a view that the ashen remains are simply being discarded since the person’s bodily existence has come to an end. Certainly God is almighty and will raise up the bodies of the dead whether they have been cremated or have naturally decomposed in a grave, but burial of the dead and visiting their graves in the cemetery are ways for people of faith to express their belief in the resurrection of the body.

This is the meaning of Easter: our Lord’s resurrection from the dead has opened to everyone the promise of bodily resurrection and eternal life in the glory of God’s kingdom. In this Eucharist, we give thanks to God for the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. Through His death and Resurrection, He has redeemed us and has anointed us to be His beloved sons and daughters for all eternity. May God give us this grace. Amen.