

**Mass for Gathering with Permanent Deacons
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

August 9, 2014

Memorial of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross

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

Reverend Fathers and deacons, in our Gospel for today's Mass, we hear the story of how Jesus, immediately following the Transfiguration, cured a boy who was possessed by a demon. The cure came after attempts by the disciples of Jesus were unsuccessful. When they asked the Lord why they had not been able to cast out the demon, Jesus responded: "Because of your little faith" (Matthew 14:20).

In his commentary on this passage, St. Hilary writes the following about the disciples: "While the Lord was delayed on the mountain, they themselves were sitting with the crowd, and a kind of torpor had weakened their faith."¹ This highlights that an essential element needed in performing the ministry of a disciple is faith. The greater the faith one has, the more the Lord will be able to do through him. The one who has little faith, however, will be less open to letting God's grace work through him.

I find this to be a helpful point of consideration for all of us who have been called to participate in the ministry of Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Orders. We can easily find ourselves being like the disciples, sitting in the crowd, giving our attention to so many different things that we risk having our faith grow weak. That is not to say that we are occupied only with worldly things, for much of what we do is indeed good and holy work. The danger that we face is that all of this ministerial work can become routine to us and result in a weakened faith with regard to the ministry to which we have been called.

It is beneficial for us and our ministry to step back from time to time to examine where we are with regard to our faith. Do we have the same zeal that we had on the day of our ordination, desiring to share the Good News with the People of God? Or, have we let ourselves become complacent, just going through the motions without a sense of purpose and enthusiasm?

Do we still approach the altar with a sense of humility and awe at being privileged to be so close to the central mystery of our faith? Or, has our participation at Mass become so routine that it is just another thing that we do without really thinking about the deeper meaning of the gift of

Christ's love poured out for us and the faithful at each Mass? Taking the opportunity to rekindle our faith as it relates to our ministry will benefit us personally as well as those to whom we minister as we let God be more effective through us.

Another aspect of the faith which is helpful for us to consider is the message that we communicate, particularly in our roles of preaching and teaching. On the day of your ordination, you resolved "to hold fast to the mystery of faith with a clear conscience, as the Apostle urges, and to proclaim this faith in word and deed according to the Gospel and the Church's tradition."² It is important that we take very seriously the obligation to communicate the truths of our Catholic faith to our people.

In our society, there is no shortage of confusion and distortion about what the Gospel actually says and what the Church teaches. It should be our intention to never contribute to that confusion through lack of clarity, watering down the truth, or offering opinions which are contrary to the faith. We should strive to always remain faithful to the deposit of faith, of which we are stewards, and not masters. We would do well to take as our guide the words that are found on the ambo here in the Cathedral from the

words of St. Paul to Titus: “*loquere quæ decent sanam doctrinam* – teach that which befits sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

It is therefore important that as you continue to engage in ongoing formation, you give an important place to your understanding of the Catholic faith which you are asked to share daily in word and deed. Such formation is intimately tied to your spiritual formation of growing in the virtue of faith, for the more you grow in your faith, the more you will have a desire to dig deeper into the endless treasures of which Christ has revealed to us and entrusted to His Church.

Let us seek the intercession of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, whose faith enflamed within her heart a desire to know the truth. Having reached the profound heights of both faith and understanding, she was able to offer herself completely to Christ, even to the point of accepting martyrdom. May our growth in these areas allow us to offer ourselves more completely to Christ, that we might be humble servants in service to His Church for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ St. Hilary of Poitiers. (2012). Commentary on Matthew. In D.H. Williams (Trans.), *The Fathers of the Church* (Vol. 125, p. 188). Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.

² Ordination of Deacons, *The Roman Pontifical* (Vatican City: Vox Clara Committee, 2012), §200, p. 108.