

**Homily for Knights of Columbus Council 1580
26th Annual Fundraiser for Vocations, Pro-Life and Newman Apostolate
St. Paul Parish - Highland, IL**

**The Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A
March 2, 2014**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, last Sunday, as I was walking out of a restaurant in Chicago, the hostess made a comment about all of the negative things that are happening in the world. She lamented the fact that the news is filled with story after story about bad things. She even asked the question with a bit of despair in her voice: "What's happening to this world?!?"

It's easy for us to point the finger in various directions in an attempt to identify the sources of those problems. Many people will point to the government as the reason for all of our woes. Some will point to the young people who no longer subscribe to the values that were once dominant in our culture. Some will point to the Internet, TV, or the movies. At the same time, we should not forget the old saying that when you point a finger, there are three fingers pointing back at you.

What I mean by this is that while it may be very true that all of these various sources can play a significant role in contributing to the troubles of our world, we must be mindful that each of us are capable of adding our own part to these problems. It is therefore important for us to be ever attentive to how our choices, words, and actions impact not just our lives, but also the lives of those around us.

In the Gospel for today's Mass, Jesus identifies one of the major roadblocks that contribute to problems in our world. That obstacle is having an attitude of an undue self-centeredness. He tells His disciples: "do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear" (Matthew 6:25). A lot of attention is given in our society to these things. It is easy to become consumed with worrying about our clothing, how we look, how much we weigh, and what kind of food we eat. That is not to say that these things are not important, but if we are spending all of our time just focused on those things, our whole world begins to revolve just around us.

When we place ourselves at the center of the universe, we do not have the time, the energy, or the desire to address the needs of others or the injustices and sins that are present all around us. If we find ourselves

falling into that type of attitude and behavior, we are just focused on our own problems and therefore do little if anything to help address the larger problems that exist in our world.

Jesus responds to this tendency toward selfishness by offering to His disciples and to us these comforting words: "So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides" (Matthew 6:31-33).

He is telling us that if we keep our focus on Him and direct our energy toward building up the Kingdom of God, we have no cause for fear. We are invited to be like children who are so at peace in the arms of their father that nothing disturbs them. Our Heavenly Father will not abandon us when we strive to put aside our own worries to follow His will and serve His people.

A model of trust in God is the example given by St. Paul in our second reading. Paul, an apostle of Jesus who had been called to be a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1), dedicated all of his energy to building up the Kingdom of God. As we hear in the second reading, he did

not let the fear of being judged by others distract him from pressing on with the work entrusted to him. He was confident that by being faithful to the commandment of love of God and neighbor, God would provide all that he needed and would help him to overcome every obstacle that he would encounter along the way.

How often do we find ourselves hesitating to act because of our fear of how others might judge us, or how we might become vulnerable in stepping outside of our comfort zone? Such fears are often rooted in that same attitude of self-centeredness where we are more concerned about how *we* might be affected by our actions as opposed to seeing the great good that God can work through our obedience to His will and His call to us to offer ourselves in service to those around us.

Later this afternoon, I will have the privilege of being present with the local Knights of Columbus at their 26th Annual Fundraiser to support Vocations, Pro-Life efforts, and the Newman Apostolate. These areas are but three of the many different ways in which the Knights of Columbus selflessly serve the Church both locally and nationally. In so doing, they are contributing in a very positive and effective way to the building up of

the Kingdom of God by responding to areas of great importance to that task.

Their support of vocations helps to encourage men and women to dedicate themselves completely to the service of God and neighbor in the priesthood and religious life. By supporting Pro-Life initiatives, they are working to build a culture of life that respects the dignity of every human being from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. Many of the injustices in our world stem from a lack of respect for the dignity of the human person, so their work in this area is indeed significant. Finally, their support of the Newman Apostolate aids Catholic campus ministry at secular universities, giving college students the needed moral and spiritual support as they prepare for their future. This grounding during such a formative time of their lives is critical for preparing them to live the rest of their lives according to the teachings of our Catholic faith in the midst of a world that is often opposed to it.

The hostess whom I mentioned at the beginning of my homily lamented the state of the world in which we live. Her distress was based mainly on what she had heard and seen in the news. Although we do not ignore these tragic stories, we know that there are also many examples of

people and groups doing good works which are impacting the world in a positive way. The example of their selfless commitment to others should serve as an encouragement to us to put aside any selfish thoughts or behaviors and to redirect that energy toward being of service to others, trusting that God will take care of all of those things which can cause so much undue anxiety in our lives. When we commit our lives to living this way, which is the way of true discipleship, we too will be that salt and light which Christ expects of us as we cooperate with Him in the building up of the Kingdom of God.

May God give us this grace. Amen.