

**Homily for the Our Lady of Good Counsel Women of Distinction Awards  
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

**June 21, 2014**

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

Reverend Monsignors and Fathers, [Deacons, consecrated men and women], members of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ; it is good for us to be here as we celebrate this Mass during which several women will receive the Our Lady of Good Counsel Women of Distinction Award.

During our Entrance Procession for today's Mass, we all joined in singing the familiar hymn: "Christ, Be Our Light", in which we pray for the light of Christ to shine in this church in which we are gathered today. Jesus uses the image of light to describe Himself when He says: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). In the first chapter of John's Gospel, He is described as the light that shines in the darkness from the very beginning of creation (cf John 1:5). He is the light foretold by the Prophet Isaiah who wrote that "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Upon those who lived in a land of gloom a light has shone" (Isaiah 9:2).

This theme of light used to describe Christ finds a visible manifestation inside of virtually every Catholic church in the form of candles. At a very minimum, each altar is adorned with candles which are lit during the Mass. It is also common to have votive candles placed in various devotional areas of a church, as you can see here in the three shrines on the north wall of the Cathedral. The presence of light reminds us of our nearness to Christ, especially here in the Church where we come to draw close to His light through our participation in the sacraments and in our prayers.

The Scriptures do not limit this theme of light just to Christ, but extends it to each of us as well. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells us: "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). This passage might sound contradictory, for Jesus had said to His disciples that *He* was the light of the world. How then, can He say that *we* are also the light of the world? The answer to that question can be found in the refrain to our opening hymn where we pray: "Christ, be our light, shine in our hearts, shine through the darkness."

The light which comes from us should have its source in the light of Christ dwelling within each one of us. Jesus tells His disciples how to let

that light shine when He said: “your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Matthew 5:16). Doing good deeds, then, is an important way by which we let His light shine through us to bring light to the darkness in the world.

In our readings for today’s Mass, we hear of the importance of following the commandments as signs that we are children of God. By living a Christian way of life patterned after the commandments, the light of Christ shines through us so that we can be recognized as truly being His followers. The good deeds which Jesus encourages us to undertake are signs of our obedience to those commandments and it is thus by following them that His light is able to shine through our lives for others to see and so be drawn into the love of God which is at the root of all of our actions.

At this Mass, we gather to recognize several women who have been obedient to the double commandment of love of God and neighbor. The light of Christ shining in them has been noticed by those who have recommended them to receive an award for being a woman of distinction in their parishes. While these women may receive special recognition today by being named, it is not ultimately to them that the praise belongs. To focus just on ourselves individually would be to forget that it is His

light, and not our own, that we seek to share with the world and so invite people to give praise to Him for the good work that He has done through us.

In this regard, we look to the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the perfect model. After her cousin, Elizabeth, tells her that she is “most blessed among women” (Luke 1:42), Mary responds with a hymn of praise to God in her *Magnificat*. This beautiful prayer captures the humble attitude that she had in response to the great honor bestowed upon her in being chosen to be the mother of the Savior. Instead of accepting the praise given to her by Elizabeth as her own, she directs all of the glory to God as she says: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior” (Luke 1:46-47). She is fully aware that this is not about her, but about the God who “has done great things” (Luke 1:49) for her. Her part was to say ‘yes’ to God’s will in her life, a ‘yes’ that would benefit all of humanity, for it was through that ‘yes’ that salvation entered into the world.

This must be our attitude as well on an occasion such as this one. The honor and glory belongs to God alone for all of the contributions of our honorees, but we rejoice in the fact that they have said ‘yes’ to God’s

will in their lives, a 'yes' through which God has "done great things" for the benefit of the Church here in our diocese. Their 'yes' has allowed the light of Christ to shine in a very visible way that has been recognized by others. Their example should encourage each of us to seek to let His light shine more brightly in us through lives of good deeds rooted in a love of God and our neighbor.

As we prepare to welcome the light of Christ into our hearts in our reception of the Eucharist, let us ask Christ to be the light that guides us in all that we say and do, so that through lives committed to serving Him and others, that light might shine ever more brightly in each of us. May Our Lady of Good Counsel intercede for us that we might imitate her humble obedience and so draw more and more people to Her Son in this life on their journey toward the Kingdom of God where we all hope to share with her and all of the saints in the perpetual light of the glory of God.

May God give us this grace. Amen.