

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

June 20, 2015

**† 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.”

According to tradition¹, the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel, presently found in the Italian village of Genezzano, which depicts the Madonna and the Christ-Child, has its origins in Albania. There, the faithful prayed to Our Lady of Good Counsel, particularly seeking protection from foreign armies and from religious persecution.

Beneath the Albanian fortress of Shkodra was a church dedicated to the Blessed Lady in which was housed an image of Our Lady, much-beloved by the Albanians because of the tender sweetness expressed through the image. With the advance of the Ottoman Turks, the faithful gathered before the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel, especially after

the death of a great Albanian warrior in 1405 as the Turks marched toward Albania.

Several decades later, the only Albanian city not yet in Turkish hands was Shkodra. When the Turks laid siege to Shkodra, two Albanians were praying in the church when they saw the image of the Madonna and Child moving away from the wall. They followed it to Rome, where the image disappeared. Later they heard rumors that a miraculous image had appeared in Genezzano. They went to investigate and found their beloved image in the church of Our Lady of Good Counsel, built centuries before in gratitude for the generosity of the people of Genezzano in the building of the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome.

Some years before the arrival of the sacred image, the church of Our Lady of Good Counsel had fallen into great disrepair. A widow of the town, Petruccia, was moved to spend all of her remaining money to rebuild the church, in the process of which she ran out of funds. The people referred to this as Petruccia's Folly. But at 4:00 p.m. on April 25, 1467, the people heard the sound of great music and saw a strange cloud lower upon the church. When it lifted, one of the unfinished walls of the church had been destroyed, but the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel was inside.

When Petruccia heard the bells calling the townsfolk to see what had happened, she fell down in tears before the image.

A little over a century later, with the Catholic Counter-Reformation taking place in Italy and throughout Europe, the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel became a symbol of lay involvement and responsibility in the Church. The widow Petruccia, a laywoman, responded to the need that she saw in her local church. She did not wait for the religious or members of the clergy to take action in ensuring that the situation was not ignored. As a result of her response, many women's groups throughout the Church have adopted the patronage of Our Lady of Good Counsel for their groups, that they too might imitate the awareness and generosity demonstrated by Petruccia.

Those of you who are being recognized today have followed the example of the widow Petruccia in your own local parishes and communities. Your eyes have seen the needs of the Church and others around you and you have responded with the gifts that the Lord has entrusted to you. You have allowed yourselves to be instruments of God's love and mercy by not turning away from those situations and individuals around you.

Our Gospel for today is a very appropriate one, for it shows the actions of Our Mother of Good Counsel herself as she demonstrates her motherly attentiveness to the needs of those around her and her reaction to those needs. She recognizes that the wedding celebration is about to run out of wine. In her desire to avoid having the host suffer the ridicule of poor planning, she quietly approaches her Son, Jesus, asking for Him to intervene. Her intercession results in the Lord working His first public miracle, transforming water into wine for the guests to enjoy.

In the midst of this story, we also have one of the few recorded examples of words spoken by Mary in the Gospels. In fact, it is in this story that we have the final recorded words of Mary in the Scriptures as she tells the servants: "Do whatever He tells you" (John 2:5). These final words are some of the greatest words of counsel in all of the Scriptures, as they invite us to look to Jesus and obey all that He asks of us. Just as at Cana, the Lord is able to multiply the little bit that we are able to offer in our poverty and so demonstrate the abundance of His love for His people.

Those of you receiving the Women of Distinction Award today are recognized for your being obedient to the teachings of Jesus who has instructed us "love your neighbor" (Mark 12:31). We can all learn from

those examples of obedience and strive to do the same in the countless ways in which the Lord invites each of us, every day, to take our attention away from ourselves and to look to the needs of others, responding with the charity that He has poured into our hearts.

As we continue this Eucharistic celebration, let us prepare to receive that gift of love into our hearts once again so that we might more readily respond to the needs of those around us, as these ladies have done. May we bring all of the needs of the Church, those that we see, and those that we don't, to Our Lady of Good Counsel, asking that she will intercede on our behalf before her Son in order to provide for those needs, thus strengthening the entire Mystical Body of Christ as we journey together toward our homeland in Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹Frisk, Jean, *Our Lady of Good Counsel*, The Marian Library / International Marian Research Institute, Dayton, OH. <http://campus.udayton.edu>.