

**Homily for the 5th Sunday of Lent, Cycle B
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

March 22, 2015

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Parents usually have high hopes and great expectations for their sons and daughters. They want the very best for their children and hope to lay the foundation for a good and successful life for them. As their children mature, these hopes and expectations may evolve through various stages as the parents have to respond to their children's personalities, talents and decisions—as well as to external circumstances. Sometime this includes real disappointments, but at each step along the way, the parents attempt to make sure that their hopes for a beautiful life reach fulfillment. Often, what their children become in reality may be far more than what their parents ever expected. We would call that a very successful and satisfying outcome.

God, too, as a loving Father, has high hopes and expectations for us, His children. He entered into a number of covenants, binding Himself to them and asking that they be His people and promising to always be their

God. They would be His people if only they followed their side of the covenant and lived as true sons and daughters of their loving Father. He even showed them how to do that by offering commandments as norms to follow.

Unfortunately, God's people were unfaithful to every covenant from Noah through Moses. The people failed to keep their side of the bargain. But as a good parent, God adapted to every situation and continued to offer new covenants as new opportunities for them to be His faithful people.

Today in our first reading, we heard a passage from the prophet Jeremiah, telling the people that God is willing to make yet another covenant—a covenant that will be written on their very hearts. Jeremiah alone in the Old Testament uses the expression “new covenant.” What makes this covenant new is not its content, because God still speaks of “my law” in this reading as in previous passages. The newness of this covenant refers to the place where it can be found. The old covenant was associated with commandments written in stone. The people had to match up to standards that were outside of them. But with this “new covenant” God sets the standard within their hearts at the very core of each person.

During these Sundays of Lent, I have been speaking about indulgences as “a remission before God of the temporal punishment for sins, whose guilt is forgiven”¹ and I have described the necessary dispositions of the heart and the conditions needed to obtain partial and plenary indulgences for ourselves as well as for the souls in purgatory. I realize that these homilies contained a great deal of specific information that would be hard to remember. I did this so that you will have heard these things at least once. Sometimes people complain that they had never heard a particular doctrine of the Catholic faith even after attending years of religion classes and listening to countless homilies. My hope is to plant a few seeds in my homilies that will stir your interest and encourage you to follow up with further reading and study. We should not and cannot expect to learn everything we need to know about our faith only by listening to brief homilies at Mass. To facilitate this, my homilies and speeches are posted on our diocesan website, www.dio.org, for easy reference. In particular, I encourage you to review and study my summary of the Church’s teachings on indulgences, which provide generous spiritual gifts to facilitate our journey to eternal life.

As I said last week, it is important to remember that it is not the mere performance of certain actions that bring about the benefits of an indulgence, but the interior spiritual disposition of one's heart and the detachment from sin that must accompany these good works. That is what Lent is all about. As we prayed in today's responsorial psalm from the words of King David in Psalm 51, "Create a clean heart in me, O God."

Today's Gospel passage from St. John makes clear that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Father's promises. In His Son Jesus, God took on our humanity in all things but sin. In doing so, He sealed the new covenant, promised in the Old Testament, in His own blood. We fulfill our side of the covenant by living as Jesus and the Church teach is to live—in love of God and one another.

As a loving Father, God has provided everything needed to make His high hopes and great expectations for us available and reachable. He has given us His word in the Bible, the sacraments, sacramentals, indulgences, the Church and her sacred ministers to guide us on the way to His Kingdom.

As we celebrate this Eucharist, we repeat the great act of Jesus whereby He laid down His life for us, sealing the new covenant in His

blood. This great act of love is now ours to offer to our God in loving response to the covenant He made with us. In this act of worship and prayer, we truly become His people and our God becomes present to us in this Holy Communion. Here we receive the strength and love we need to live as His faithful children, for the Law of the Heart is Love.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Apostolic Penitentiary, *Manual of Indulgences: Norms and Grants*, English translation of the *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*, fourth edition, 1999, (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), N1, p. 13.