

**Homily at the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women Convention
September 27, 2016**

**St. Michael the Archangel Church
Sigel, Illinois**

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

Reverend Fathers,
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is good that we are here for this Holy Mass offered for the Convention of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women. I am grateful to Father Sunder Ery and the people of Saint Michael the Archangel Parish for welcoming us with such gracious hospitality.

Today's Gospel passage from Saint Luke speaks to us about hospitality. As the Lord Jesus made His way up to Jerusalem to endure His Passion out of love for us, we are told that "He sent messengers ahead of Him" (Luke 9:51). Although the Evangelist does not state the message given them to announce, we can surmise that the message was one of an expected hospitality. If not, it would make little sense for Saint Luke to tell us the Samaritan villagers "would not welcome him" (Luke 9:53). The Samaritans refuse to offer Jesus hospitality because He is journeying to Jerusalem, and the Samaritans rejected Jerusalem as a place of worship.

Their refusal to extend hospitality to Christ the Lord angered two of his Apostles, who asked to be granted permission “to call down fire from heaven to consume them” (Luke 9:54). This request seems to us to be something of an overreaction, but it connects Jesus with the prophet Elijah, who called down fire from heaven to consume his opponents (see 2 Kings 1:10). In the reaction from James and John we can see their devotion and their recognition of Jesus as the true and long-expected Messiah. But in Jesus’ response to His disciples rebuking them for suggesting such violence, we see that Jesus is a very different kind of king leading a type of kingdom they had not envisioned. The sons of Zebedee had not yet realized that disciples of Jesus “should not quarrel, but should be gentle with everyone” because “the wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God” (2 Timothy 2:24; James 1:20).

Although we might not ask permission to destroy people or villages when someone refuses to welcome Christ or us in his name, we may sometimes wish something bad to befall them as punishment. But “if the Lord of majesty did not want to become angered at such great inhumanity, how much less should we become indignant over it?”¹ Because “good messengers faithfully execute the command of their Lord,” this meekness

of Christ, his loving humility, should be found in us whom he has also sent to prepare hearts to welcome him when he comes.²

Today, many people have grown despondent and ask with Job, as we heard in our first reading, “Why did I not perish at birth, come forth from the womb and expire” (Job 3:11)? The burdens and difficulties of life weigh heavy upon them and, seeing little hope or no purpose in life, they feel abandoned and passed over. For this reason they say, “my soul is surfeited with troubles and my life draws near to the nether world” (Psalm 88:4). It is to these, especially, that we must go bearing the message of salvation; we must say to them, “The Son of man came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many,” to give His life as a ransom for you (Mark 10:45). As messengers sent to prepare the way before Jesus, we must never be afraid to ask someone to open his or her heart to the Lord to receive the joy of His love.

It is a paradox of the Gospel that we whom the Lord Jesus sends to ask others to welcome Him must also welcome those to whom He sends us. We cannot lose sight of the importance of welcoming others, as Saint Teresa of Calcutta so often showed us, as if they were Christ himself. When we surveyed Catholics about why they attend Mass on Sundays, the

number one reason was a sense of community within the parish. When we surveyed Catholics about why they do not attend Mass on Sundays, 30% cited feeling a lack of community within the parish.³

Of those who attend Mass, 85.5% said, “My parish is hospitable;” 89.7% said, “I feel welcome at my parish;” and 86% said, “My parish has a warm, friendly feeling.”⁴ Clearly, then, we are doing something right, but there is always room for improvement. This is why in my recent pastoral letter *Ars crescendi in Dei gratia*, I called us to renew and increase our efforts of hospitality as one of the four pillars of a stewardship way of life. More specifically, I called us to “invite people to join us in prayer, especially Sunday Mass.”⁵ Such an invitation is more than a welcome and requires an active intentionality on our part. Just as those messengers sent by Jesus to the Samaritan village, we must invite our family and friends, co-workers, neighbors, and strangers, to open their hearts to the Lord Jesus, to participate in His Passion through an active and conscious participation in the Holy Mass.

The members of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women have done much over the years to carry out this mission of hospitality in the Church, and for your efforts, I am deeply grateful. You have helped an untold

number of people grow in God's grace by welcoming them with food, a smile, and a kind word. This method worked well in the past, but it does not seem to work so well with the millennial generation. They are looking for something deeper, something more personal, and something that speaks more clearly of Christ.

I urge you, then, to seek new ways to welcome people and invite them into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Strive for new ways to show everyone that "we are a Church of sinners saved by Christ, but we must never tire of seeking to become more virtuous and dedicated disciples of Jesus."⁶ If we deepen our efforts at hospitality by welcoming every person as Christ, then we can truly help the world to see that "the Church exists to show people how to be happy, both in this life and the life to come."⁷

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Saint Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 9.96. Robert J. Karris, trans. (Saint Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2003), 908.

² *Ibid.*, 9.96.

³ Phillip R. Hardy, Kelly L. Kandra, and Brian G. Patterson, *Joy and Grievance in an American Diocese: Results from Online Surveys of Active and Inactive Catholics in Central Illinois* (Lisle, Illinois: Benedictine University, 2014), 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵ Thomas John Paprocki, *Ars crescendi in Dei gratia*, 72.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.