

**Homily for 100th Anniversary of St. Constance Parish
Chicago, Illinois**

**Twenty-Ninth Sunday of the Year - Cycle C
October 16, 2016**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here for this Mass to celebrate the 100th anniversary of St. Constance Parish in Chicago. I am very grateful to your Pastor, Father Ted Dzieszko, for his gracious invitation to celebrate this centennial Mass with you. I return here with many fond memories of my two and a half years as your pastor from 2001 to 2003. Although that time was relatively brief, it was a very significant pastoral experience that helped to form me for my ministry as bishop. In fact, it was while I was serving as your Pastor that Pope St. John Paul II appointed me Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago on January 24, 2003. Even after I was ordained a Bishop by Cardinal George on March 19, 2003, I continued to serve as your Pastor until June 30th of that year. The parishioners were very generous in purchasing vestments and other ceremonial articles as gifts for me to use as a Bishop, including my crozier. This pastoral staff was engraved with the image of the steeple and cross of

St. Constance Church, so I always have a reminder of you and the parish where I served as Pastor!

It can be an interesting exercise to look back in history to see what was going on in our world when we celebrate events such as this. In 1916, much attention was given to World War I, raging in several locations and resulting in massive loss of life. Shortly after that war ended, on November 11, 1918, Poland regained her independence after 124 years of partition and oppression by the three contiguous empires, Austria, Germany (Prussia), and Russia. Here in the United States, the Professional Golfer Association, better known as the PGA, was founded. Woodrow Wilson was elected to a second term as the President of the United States. In 1916, the average price of a new car was 400 dollars, and the cost of a stamp was 2 cents. The Boston Red Sox won the 1916 World Series. Who knows, maybe the Chicago Cubs will win a World Series in the next one hundred years!

That year also saw John D. Rockefeller, co-founder of the Standard Oil Company, become the world's first billionaire. Having not been born into wealth, Rockefeller had to work hard to become the businessman and philanthropist that he was. One of his more famous quotes reflected this

path that he followed to achieving his fortune. He said the following: "I do not think that there is any other quality so essential to success of any kind as the quality of perseverance."

Indeed, we can look to any undertaking and see how important perseverance is in yielding successful results. The Church is no exception. There are countless examples from our history that prove this point. While it is true that the Church, founded by Jesus Christ, has been given divine assistance so that "the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it" (John 16:18), it is also true that Jesus did not intend for the Church to move forward on auto-pilot. In other words, it was His desire that the members of the Church should exercise their free will in choosing to cooperate with God's grace in the guidance and life of the Church in the world. When our human nature and free will are involved, perseverance will always be necessary!

We see this played out in the readings for today's Mass. In our first reading from the Book of Exodus, the army of Amalek poses a serious threat for the tribes of Israel. But Moses, at least, seems confident that the Jewish people can stand up to them. He directs Joshua to engage the enemy, not with all able soldiers, but only with certain chosen men. As

long as these selected fighters can see the staff of God held high by Moses, they prevail against the enemy. When Moses grows tired and lowers the staff, the Israelites lose the advantage on the field. As a result, Aaron and Hur must stand on either side of Moses all day long to ensure that the staff of God is held aloft and visible for the Israelites fighting below.

What we learn from this story is how Moses was the very symbol of prayer for the Jewish people in their struggles with a great enemy. We learn from the example of Moses the importance of perseverance in prayer, but we also learn that we do not pray in isolation. Moses was able to persevere in prayer, not only because he was a man of prayer, but also because he had help from others who helped him with his prayer, and together they were able to help the whole community.

Following along this line, Saint Paul in his second Letter of to Timothy urged the beloved, "Remain faithful to what you have learned and believed" and he encouraged them to "be persistent" in proclaiming the Word of God "whether it is convenient or inconvenient." This message is further reinforced in today's Gospel passage, where Saint Luke relates that "Jesus told his disciples a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary."

In the nearly two-thousand year history of the Church, we have seen perseverance practiced in countless situations, from the situations involving the Universal Church to those involving individual parishes. Today, as we celebrate one hundred years of Catholic life here at St. Constance Parish in Chicago, we are well-aware that perseverance has been an important ingredient in the recipe for success that has been achieved here.

Reviewing the history of the parish, we note that St. Constance Parish was organized in 1916 at the request of ninety Polish families who belonged to Our Lady of Victory Church. Members of the Polonia Club of Our Lady of Victory parish asked Auxiliary Bishop Paul P. Rhode to help them in their efforts to obtain a parish of their own. Archbishop George W. Mundelein acceded to the request and on July 16, 1916, he appointed Rev. Alex Knitter, a former assistant at St. Adalbert Church, to organize the new national parish in the district known as Colonial Gardens, part of the larger Jefferson Park community.

Late in 1916, work began at 5809 W. Strong St. on a three story combination church and school building, which was dedicated on

Oct. 7, 1917 by Archbishop Mundelein. The School Sisters of Notre Dame accepted Father Knitter's invitation to staff the parish school. In 1932, the School Sisters of Notre Dame established a two year commercial high school on the second floor of the school building; by 1937, a four year academic program was in effect.

Following the elevation of Archbishop Samuel A. Stritch to the College of Cardinals, St. Constance high school was renamed Cardinal Stritch high school in 1947. It became a central high school for boys and girls from northwest side parishes.

On May 17, 1970, John Cardinal Cody dedicated the new St. Constance Church and the Handzel Center. Also in 1970, the decision was made to close Cardinal Stritch high school because it was no longer feasible to operate such a small secondary school.

As succeeding generations became more assimilated to American culture, by the 1960's St. Constance Parish itself became more Americanized, with wide representation of people of every national heritage. After the fall of Communism and the restoration of a freedom in Poland in 1989, the decade of the 1990's saw a new influx of immigrants from Poland. To this day, St. Constance Parish

retains its strong ethnic composition with a predominantly Polish flavor, but with a variety of other nationalities in an American context.

All of you are the beneficiaries of the great tradition of perseverance exercised by those who have gone before you. This is true in the broad sense as we look to the many saints throughout the history of the Church, and in the more narrow sense by looking to the families and parishioners of this parish who have helped to build the foundation upon which you now stand as a parish community.

It is now your turn to continue to build upon that foundation by committing yourselves to that perseverance required to keep going forward as a parish community. The Lord's blessings have been shared abundantly here, and that assistance is sure to continue. But we must always be mindful that the Lord wants us to choose freely to cooperate with His plan by putting the gifts that we have at the service of this parish community.

As we continue our celebration of this Mass, we bring to the Lord our gratitude for every gift received, especially the gift of this parish. We are grateful also for the vocations of the priests and religious sisters that have

come from this parish. We pray for more young people to say yes to God's call to follow Him and serve His Church. We ask that the Lord will expand all of our hearts through the reception of the Eucharist so that we might willingly and joyfully commit ourselves to a life of stewardship and discipleship, thus continuing to build on the firm foundation upon which we now stand. Let us pray for the grace to persevere in this journey, trusting that the Lord will multiply what we are able to offer to Him, thus assisting all of us to come to share in the victory of the Resurrection.

May God give us this grace. Amen.