

**Homily for the 100th Anniversary of St. Louis School
Nokomis, Illinois**

**Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle C
September 10, 2016**

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

Reverend Father(s), (Consecrated Religious), Faculty and staff of St. Louis School, students, parents, and brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good that we are here to begin this celebration of one hundred years of our St. Louis Catholic School here in Nokomis. We begin this 100th year of Catholic Education as a beacon of light and love educating not only future members of our society, but future disciples of Jesus Christ. As we begin this celebration we look to the past and our history to inspire us to hope for the future.

It can be an interesting exercise to look back at our history. In 1917 Woodrow Wilson was President of the United States of America, and we entered into what seemed at the time to be the endless war, World War I. The famous street cars of San Francisco began their service. The Chicago White Sox beat the New York Giants to win the World Series! So maybe the Chicago Cubs will win a World Series in your next one hundred years! The first Jazz records were recorded by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. The United States purchased the Virgin Islands from Denmark. In the Catholic world, the miraculous appearances, over six months, of our Mother Mary to the three

shepherd children in Fatima took place, known as Our Lady of Fatima.

The average family income in 1917 was approximately \$2,300. Right here in Nokomis in 1917, the parish had grown because of the opening of two mines, and the need for a school was realized. St. Louis Catholic School opened in September of 1917 to the cost of \$26,000. The school was a major investment for a people who earned so little, but gave so much to begin our school and our history. Their faith, vision, and generosity provided us the foundation for one hundred years of Catholic Education.

Six School Sisters of Notre Dame arrived to staff the school, which opened in September of 1917. In the first year the enrollment of the school, under their care, grew to 180 students. St. Louis school has had its ups and downs, but always had the support of the parish community. For example in 1931 Msgr. Johannes announced the school was having financial difficulties and may need to close. In the height of the great depression the parish held a bazaar to save the school by raising \$700. The school children also participated in the effort to support the school financially, raffling off a live lamb, a large cake, and an art basket.

In 1937 an electric stove and refrigerator were installed. In 1943 the first kindergarten class began. In 1949 the first lay teacher, Marjorie Coady, was

hired. In 1953 the school began the first boys' basketball program. In 1955 the first ditto machine was purchased by the Parents' club. In 1979 the sisters took some students and parishioners to Chicago to see Pope John Paul II, now St. John Paul the Great, during his first visit to the United States.

In these brief highlights of our school we see much love poured into St. Louis School. This love was grounded in the faith that has now been passed down for one hundred years here in our beloved school. Our faith is the central part of Catholic Education. This faith is grounded in prayer and the sacraments. This faith is lived out in the example of Moses interceding for God's chosen people. They were broken, sinful, and turned away from God. This act of intercession in prayer speaking to the Lord is the foundation of Catholic Education. Prayer and the sacraments taught to our children feed this work. They feed this seed of faith we plant in these young ones in Catholic Education. It is this faith that we hear St. Paul speak of in his letter to Timothy: a faith filled with gratitude. St. Paul speaks of his gratitude to Christ Jesus for strengthening him and appointing him to ministry. All of us who work to build the faith and most especially our Catholic School teachers and faculty are called and supported by God's grace in their ministry to teach and form our young people to be disciples of Jesus Christ to go out into this world and spread the Gospel.

We are called to form and educate young disciples, to reach out to these young children, to guide them and search them out wherever they are in their lives, and to bring them to Christ in the example of the Gospel. The shepherd goes after the lost sheep and the woman seeks out the lost coin. We work tirelessly to form disciples and we see this example of the shepherd in the Gospel Parable today as he places that lost sheep on his shoulder and carries it home. These two parables would have sounded foreign to the people Jesus was speaking to, as one would not leave the 99 sheep behind to find the one or spend the lamp and work to find the lost coin. They would have seen these actions as a waste of time and resources. Christ gives us the new way and the new example. We who work in the Church to form disciples see this example. We go forth to find the lost. We go forth to seek the forgotten. We go forth spending our time and resources to carry the sheep home to Christ. There is no more important mission than to bring these children that have been formed for these one hundred years home to Jesus Christ as we form them to be disciples. The countless sisters, the many priests, the numerous lay people, and God's holy people, as intentional disciples, chose to respond to the Lord's generosity to them, and by that response have touched so many lives over the past century of the existence of St. Louis School.

Looking to the future, may we continue to respond to the generosity of God, as did countless others before us here at St. Louis School. May we continue to see this mission of forming disciples for Christ as of utmost importance in our parish family. May we continue the work of love that the priests, sisters, lay teachers, and so many faith-filled parishioners have done for these one hundred years. Let us today, as we begin this centennial celebration, now focus our eyes to the hope of the future. Let us today recommit ourselves to Jesus Christ and His work of forming disciples for the new millennium here at St. Louis School. Let us as a parish, as a school, as parishioners, as teachers, and as priests carry these sheep home to the heart of Jesus Christ. This is our mission. This is our call as stewards and disciples. This is our faith and our work TODAY and into the next century and beyond.

May God give us this grace. Amen.