

**Homily for Curial Employee Recognition Mass  
April 27, 2016**

**Catholic Pastoral Center  
St. Viator Chapel  
Springfield**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: this past Saturday, I had the opportunity to venerate some of the relics of Pope St. John Paul II at an event held in our diocese. During a talk that I was invited to give at this event, I shared some of my personal experiences of meeting this great saint, something I had the privilege of doing on several occasions. I also spoke about the remarkable contribution that he made to the Church through his many writings on a wide variety of topics.

It can be debated as to which of these writings was most significant and impactful, but I think for him personally, the one document that holds great importance was the one he wrote for the beginning of the New Millennium, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. In the introductory paragraphs of that document, he writes that “[f]rom the beginning of my Pontificate, my thoughts had been on this Holy Year 2000 as an important appointment.”<sup>1</sup>

The story is told that shortly after the conclave that elected Pope John Paul II in 1978, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Archbishop of Warsaw and Primate of Poland, pulled the new pope aside and told him that the Lord had chosen him to lead the Church into the Third Millennium. These words must have had a profound impact on him as he wrote about this theme repeatedly as the jubilee year approached, reaching its culmination with his promulgation of that important document.

When I have the occasion to install new pastors in our diocese, I always like to quote from this document when the pope writes the following: "I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness."<sup>2</sup> I use this as a reminder to our priests that holiness must be at the center of everything that they do – not just in the activities of their parish, but in their personal lives as well.

These words from our late Holy Father were directed not just to priests, but indeed to all of the Christian faithful. On this point, he writes the following:

As the Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence,

possible only for a few “uncommon heroes” of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual.<sup>3</sup>

To highlight this, he reflected on the privilege he had of beatifying and canonizing a large number of Christians during his pontificate, many of whom were “lay people who attained holiness in the most ordinary circumstances of life.”<sup>4</sup>

This provides a helpful connection to what we are doing here today as we celebrate our Annual Curial Employee Recognition Mass. Beyond the many individual accomplishments and contributions that you make, what I would like to recognize in a particular way is your daily fidelity to the ordinary circumstances of your life and your work. It is good to be reminded from time to time that we do not need to look for something extraordinary in order to exercise this universal call to holiness. Every opportunity, regardless of how routine or mundane it might be, is an opportunity for practicing holiness.

In the Gospel for today’s Mass, Jesus uses the image of the vine and the branches to explain the relationship that we have with Him. He explains that our being able to bear good fruit is dependent on our being united with Him as He reminds us: “without me you can do nothing”

(John 15:5). We have been experiencing many good fruits in our diocese and here at our pastoral center, none of which would be possible if our efforts, both large and small, were not rooted in holiness, so I am confident that we are indeed moving in the right direction.

As our diocese continues to move forward with adopting a way of life focused on stewardship and discipleship, we do so knowing that we already have a firm foundation upon which to build. I am convinced that your efforts to root your lives in holiness, personally and in your work here, has contributed significantly to the positive attitude about this initiative throughout our diocese. I would just like to reiterate the importance of keeping our attention fixed on this awareness that our commitment to finding holiness in our daily work is serving to strengthen the culture of growth in discipleship in our diocese.

In the end, it is also helpful for us to be reminded that our holiness and that of others is always pointing us upward toward Heaven. The goal toward which all of our efforts are directed is the salvation of souls. This has always been the focus of the Church, even from her earliest days. In our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, the dispute about whether or not to follow all of the traditional Jewish practices of the Mosaic Law

was connected with the question of the requirements for salvation. The Church held the Council of Jerusalem to discuss this issue, because they recognized the importance of ensuring that what is practiced and what is believed is ordered toward that most important issue of salvation.

Embracing a life of holiness through stewardship and discipleship is not just about having better programs and more people in our pews. All of the benefits that make this way of life attractive are all secondary to the one benefit that really matters, being with God and one another in Heaven.

Once again, I want to thank you for your faithful collaboration with me in this important work. I hope you join with me in seeing what a privilege we have in being so closely involved in bringing about this reality of inviting all in our diocese to greater holiness, leading to that ultimate goal of our salvation. May our reception of the Holy Eucharist keep us united to Christ as branches are united to the vine, and strengthen us to continue the good work that has begun in us as we look forward to its completion in the glory of Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, §2.

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, §30.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*