

**Memorial Mass for Reverend Anthony J. Schmidt
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

July 9, 2016

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

Reverend Fathers and Deacons, consecrated men and women, beloved members of the family of Father Anthony Schmidt, dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

On behalf of my predecessors who served as Bishop of our diocese, and in my own name, I offer my prayerful condolences to Father Anthony Schmidt's brother, Father Carl Schmidt, their family members, friends, fellow priests and faithful who have come to celebrate this Memorial Mass for the repose of the soul of Father Anthony Schmidt.

During his sixty-six years as a priest, Father Tony Schmidt served faithfully as Assistant Pastor at St. Mary Parish, Alton; Ss. Peter and Paul, Springfield; and St. John, Quincy. In 1962, he named Pastor at St. Patrick Parish in Grafton and St. Michael in Beltrees. From 1964 until 1994, Father Tony served as Pastor of St. Lawrence Parish in Greenville. He officially

retired from administrative responsibilities in 1994, but continued to provide priestly ministry and sacramental services for many more years.

Since I did not become diocesan bishop here until 2010, I never knew Father Tony when he was in his prime. But I did see him regularly at priest gatherings. My favorite memory of Father Tony Schmidt was two years ago when I hosted a series of dinners for groups of about ten priests each time at my residence on the third floor of the Cathedral Rectory. Father Tony came with his brother, Father Carl Schmidt, on May 27, 2014. It was the day of their sixty-fourth anniversary as priests and it was the first time in those sixty-four years that they had dinner with their bishop in the episcopal dining room! I could tell they were both thrilled to be there and we had a very enjoyable dinner.

We are having this Memorial Mass for Father Tony rather than a Mass of Christian burial because in his last act of generously giving of himself, Father Tony donated his body to science for medical research. Father Tony's only request for this Memorial Mass was that I preach about the priesthood, so I will be pleased to do so as he wished.

Just last month we had a wonderful retreat for our priests at the King's House Retreat Center in Belleville, Illinois. Our Retreat Master was Father Sebastian Walshe, a Norbertine priest from St. Michael's Abbey in the Diocese of Orange, California. Father Walshe's theme for the Retreat was on the priesthood as described in Gospel of Saint Luke. It was an excellent and very substantive retreat about the priesthood, so I would like to share some highlights with you as a way to fulfill Father Tony's request.

The classic definition of a priest is one who mediates between God and man by means of sacrifice (cf. Deuteronomy 5:5 and Hebrews 5:1). The priest of the New Testament is more than this; he is not just a mediator, but he acts *in persona Christi*. Father Walshe puts it this way:

If we are going to profit from the instruction about the priesthood found in this Gospel, it is important that we have a correct and accurate idea of what a priest is. A priest is a mediator between God and man, who unites them by means of sacrifice. Thus, in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses says: "I was the mediator and stood between the Lord and you at that time to show you his words" (Deut 5:5); and in the epistle to the Hebrews it is written: "For every high priest taken from among men, is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God,

that he might offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins” (Heb 5:1). St. Thomas says simply that a priest is a mediator between God and the people. But this definition of priesthood encompasses both the priesthood of the old and new covenants. What is it that specifies the priesthood of Jesus Christ? First of all, the priest of Jesus Christ acts in the person of Christ. When he says Mass, he says “This is *my* body” not “this is Christ’s body.” When he forgives sins, he says “*I* absolve you of your sins,” not “Christ absolves you of your sins.” This is striking.¹

If we are to act in the person of Christ, we must identify with His sonship, modeling our relationship with God on Jesus’s relationship with His Father. As sons, our relationship to God is not just creature to Creator, but a filial relationship of son and Father, sharing in the nature He has shared with us.

Second, in the new covenant, priest and victim are one, as Jesus was both priest and victim. “In the old covenant, the victim was different from the priest, but in the new dispensation, Jesus offers himself as the victim on the cross. We priests too must accept that it belongs to the very nature of our priesthood to be victims with Christ.”² In the Book of Leviticus, chapter 16, the scapegoat takes on the sins of the people and is sent out to

the desert to confront the devil. This prefigures Christ's temptation in the desert. As priests we take on the sins of our flock to do penance for them. We are both priest and victim.

“Finally, a third significant difference between the priests of the old and new covenant is that the priesthood of the new covenant is completely universal or catholic. The old priesthood was limited to the people Israel, but the new has been instituted for all men, just as Jesus our High Priest, came for the salvation of all. For there is ‘one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ’ (1 Tim 2:5).”³

The central part of St. Luke's Gospel is preparing his apostles for the new priesthood. Referring back to the Book of Malachi, where the prophet is described as purifying and refining, priests are purified and refined to prepare them for their ministry.

In chapters 4 through 9 of St. Luke's Gospel, we see Jesus preparing the whole people for the new priesthood through his teaching and miracles. Jesus proclaims His “mission statement” in Luke 4:18-21. We are all sent, in Latin *missio*, which is where the word “mission” comes from. Even Jesus was sent by His Father.

In Jesus' healing of the paralytic (Luke 4:17-26), He "sees *their* faith" (i.e., the faith of the *crowd*), and then forgives the sins of the paralytic. Notice the role of the community in Jesus' healing ministry. One of the key differences between Protestant and Catholic theology is that Protestants tend to think that God acts directly in the world without any human intervention, while Catholics understand God as acting through the instrumentality of the Church and the sacraments that He founded. God shows His glory by shining His graces through the instrumentality of weak and sinful human beings. God also has chosen to work through means that are familiar to people and not intimidating to them. God's use of human instruments helps us to grow in love for each other.

The call of St. Peter in Luke 5:1-11 shows how Simon Peter was afraid that he was unworthy of the call, but Jesus tells him not to be afraid and that from now on he will be a fisher of men. Peter eventually learns to move from saying, "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinner," to, "Stay with me, Lord, for I am a sinner." We may not be able to stop sinning, but we can stop loving our sins. Despite our sinfulness, God continues to forgive us, to love us and to call us.

In Luke, from chapter 9 verse 53 through chapter 21, Jesus prepares His apostles for the new priesthood.

In Luke, from chapter 9 verse 53 through chapter 14, the focus is on the purity of heart that His priests will need.

In Luke, from chapter 15 through chapter 17, the focus is on the mercy that His priests must have for people in their ministry. Mercy is not just goodness, but goodness that dispels suffering. Suffering is not just physical, but spiritual. Discouragement, for example, comes from an evil spirit. An example of priestly mercy helping those who suffer spiritually is to assist those who experience discouragement to make an act of the will rejecting it. We seek to displace discouragement with joy, since joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Of course then in Luke 15:11-32, we have the great parable of the Prodigal Son and his brother. Notice that the parable starts with the son hating his father. This is apparent because the son asks for his inheritance, implying that the son considers the father as dead to him. The father in his kindness lets him go. The son eventually comes to his senses (v. 17) and realizes that he was wrong and his father was just. He returns to his father

(v. 18), not to his house, because he now has no property rights. The father sees his son returning, looks on him with compassion, runs to him and embraces his son (v. 20). The son acknowledges his sin and says he no longer deserves to be called his son; he was planning on adding that he should be treated as one of his servants, but before can say that, the father calls for a ring and sandals to be put on his son and killing the fatted calf for a party. The older brother reacts with envy and wrath rather than sharing in the joy of his father and his brother. Envy prevents us from recognizing God's generosity in lavishing His gifts as He chooses. His father responds by pointing out to the older brother the he has always been with him (v. 31). Thus, the older brother is also fixated on the property and not on his relationship with his father. He fails to see what is truly important. Again, we are called to sees ourselves as sons of a loving Father.

In Luke 22:1-46, Jesus anticipates His Passion and Death in three ways: 1) sacramentally at the Last Supper, 2) prophetically in predicting the betrayal of Judas and the denial of Peter, and 3) prayerfully in the Garden.

A major part of Jesus' Passion is the betrayal of Judas, the denial of St. Peter, and abandonment by His friends (Luke 22:47-62). Jesus loved His

friends, so their abandonment must have pained Him deeply. As Jesus had friends, a priest must have friends. Specifically, he must have priest friends.

The betrayal by Judas is linked to the Last Supper. Judas was lost because he did not believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist (as clearly stated by Jesus in John 6:60-71).

Peter's denial of Jesus was due to a lack of trust in the Lord and relying on his own strength. The key message here is that we all have the potential to be Judas and Peter if we do not rely on God's grace.

There are 4 steps that lead to Peter's fall: 1) Peter stops praying and sleeps while Jesus is praying in the garden; 2) he relies on his strength by attacking the soldier with his sword; 3) he follows Jesus from a distance; and 4) he seeks comfort in fitting in with the world. We priests must avoid these pitfalls if we wish to avoid falling as Peter did.

At the crucifixion, Mary is co-redemptrix because she kneels at the foot of the cross, not asking Jesus to come down from the cross, but shares in His passion. Priests must have a strong devotion to our Blessed Mother.

In the encounters with His disciples after His resurrection from the dead, “we can see the overall plan by which Jesus remedies their lack of spiritual understanding: first he questions them; second, he teaches them authoritatively; third, he enlightens them by means of the sacraments, in particular the Eucharist; finally, he sends them out to make new disciples. This is the method every priest should use: first listening to and questioning his flock so that those to whom he speaks can express what is in their hearts, especially their fears. Next, he catechizes them. Then, he administers the Sacraments to them. Finally, a good priest forms his flock in such a way that they can go out and make disciples of others.”⁴

At the very end of this Gospel, St. Luke describes the Ascension of the Lord into heaven. The last line of Saint Luke’s Gospel tells us how the disciples responded to Christ’s Ascension: “They did him homage, and then returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continuously in the temple praising God” (Luke 24:52-53).

The priests of the New Covenant, therefore, offer from the temple a sacrifice of praise. St. Bede ends his commentary on this Gospel with these words:

Luke has undertaken to explain more fully than the rest the priesthood of Christ; and his Gospel, which he commenced with the ministry of the temple in the priesthood of Zacharias, he has finished with devotion in the temple. And he has placed the Apostles there, about to be the ministers of a new priesthood, not in the blood of sacrifices, but in the praises of God and in blessing, so that in the place of prayer and amidst the praises of their devotion, they might wait with prepared hearts for the promise of the Spirit.⁵

So too, we priests and people of the New Covenant, now gather with devotion in this temple of the Lord, giving thanks and praise to God for the life and priestly ministry of Father Anthony Schmidt. As he spent sixty-six years – two-thirds of a century – leading people to God’s grace by celebrating countless Masses, administering the sacraments and conducting funeral rites, we now offer this Eucharist asking the Lord to lead Father Anthony Schmidt to the fullness of God’s grace in the eternal happiness of His heavenly kingdom.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Father Sebastian Walshe, O.Praem., "Priests after the Heart of Jesus Christ: Lessons and Meditations from the Gospel of St. Luke" (unpublished manuscript, 2016), p. 3-4.

² Walshe, "Priests after the Heart of Jesus Christ," p. 5.

³ Walshe, "Priests after the Heart of Jesus Christ," p. 5.

⁴ Walshe, "Priests after the Heart of Jesus Christ," p. 190.

⁵ St. Bede, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, quoted in Walshe, "Priests after the Heart of Jesus Christ," p. 195.