

**Homily for the Final Mass in St. Mark Church
31st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
October 30, 2016**

**St. Mark Church
Venice, Illinois**

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

Reverend Father and Deacon,
Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We have gathered here at the altar of the Lord with the confidence that “the Lord lifts up all who are falling” (Psalm 145:14). Our hearts are indeed heavy this morning as we offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the last time here in St. Mark Church. Although this day has undoubtedly been foreseen for some time, this does not lessen the sadness of this day. I am grateful that you have come together today and I ask the Lord Jesus to lift up your hearts, to help you remember that he is “compassionate toward all his works” (Psalm 145:9). Even today, with sorrowing hearts and tearful eyes, we must repeat again, “I will praise your name for ever, my king and my God” (cf. Psalm 145:1).

Particular places have great significance of in our lives of faith, as the Holy Father Pope Francis wrote in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si’*. “The

history of our friendship with God," he said, "is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good."¹ So it is that today we wish to recall the memories we have of our experiences in this church, both joyful and sorrowful, and to remember those who have touched our lives and nourished our faith in this church.

This church and the ones which preceded it here in Venice are where so many of you and your ancestors were brought into the love of God in the waters of Baptism, a union that was sealed and strengthened in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation and nourished again and again in the reception of the Holy Eucharist. Here husbands and wives were joined together in the bond of matrimony and sent forth to reflect the love of Jesus to all the world. Here sins were forgiven and sinners were reconciled to God and to his Church. Here the sick were anointed with the sacred oil and comforted by the presence of Christ. Here the souls of loved ones were commended to the merciful hand of God. In all of these experiences – and in many others, as well – the name of the Lord Jesus was glorified as he entered the homes of our hearts (cf. II Thessalonians 11:12 and Luke 19:5).

You know well that your forebears in the faith who helped establish the Catholic community here in Venice were “mostly immigrants from Germany and Ireland or the first generation of those who had come from those countries to seek their fortune or pursue their religion in a new world, free from civil or religious oppression.”² We might rightly say that “they were sturdy in character and strong in faith,” two characteristics that we see born out throughout the history of St. Mark’s Parish.³

As I look back on the history of St. Mark Parish as recorded in the diamond jubilee history of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois compiled in 1928, the repeated obstacles confronting this parish and the resiliency of the parishioners stand out in a particular way. In this history, we read, for example, of this difficulty, by no means the only one: “On January 1, 1925, St. Mark’s for the third time in forty-five years sustained a loss of membership by the transfer of the English-speaking parishioners residing in Madison to St. Mary’s Parish of Madison.”⁴ Within this repeated pattern of loss, you continued to allow the name of the Lord Jesus to be glorified in you even as the seed falls into the ground to produce much fruit (cf. John 12:24). When the parish of St. Mark merged fourteen years ago with St. Mary’s in Madison, you suffered yet another loss, just as you do today. As

your forebears did so many times in your history, I ask you to imitate their sturdy characters and their strong faith by remaining near the “LORD and lover of souls” (Wisdom 11:26).

With the merging of the two parishes fourteen years ago, you gained, as it were, another heavenly patron to intercede for you alongside the Evangelist Saint Mark, the Blessed Virgin Mary. We know that Mary continually reflected on the joys and sorrows of her life and of the life of her Son, Jesus (cf. Luke 2:19). In this, she is a great model for you to follow. As you remember the joys and sorrows you experienced in this church and recall the history of your friendship with God and the many ways it is connected with this church, take up your rosaries and ponder these memories with Mary. Ask her to teach you to unite yourself more closely to the mystery of the Lord’s Cross so that his name be continually glorified in you.

At the conclusion of his Gospel, Saint Mark tells us that the disciples, after seeing the Lord Jesus ascend to the right hand of the Father, “went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it” (Mark 16:20). If you ponder with Mary the mystery of

your friendship with God, she can help you be prepared to follow the example of Saint Mark and preach the Gospel wherever you go. May the Eucharist we now share be a sign of our gratitude for the gifts received here at Saint Mark Church and nourish us for the journey that beckons us to the Kingdom of God.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 84.

² Joseph J. Thompson, ed., *Diocese of Springfield in Illinois Diamond Jubilee History* (Springfield, Illinois: Hartman Printing, Co., 1928), 391.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 397.