

**Homily for Holy Saturday at the
Easter Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter
April 15, 2017**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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

Reverend Fathers, deacons, consecrated religious, and my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is on this sacred night of the Easter Vigil of our Lord Jesus Christ that we who have been baptized recommit ourselves to Christ and joyfully welcome new brothers and sisters to our community of faith, which we might also call our “team.” Tonight, no one is sitting on the sidelines, because God has chosen each one of us and we have positively accepted to remember Christ’s passion, death and resurrection in our words and our actions. You may have heard the saying, “Catholicism is a team sport” or that the Catholic faith is to be engaged and lived as part of a community, a team. This Holy Saturday, we are called to welcome new teammates to the largest team in the world, Christ’s team, the 1.2 billion-member Catholic Church.

You might be saying, “Bishop Paprocki, we know you’re the Holy Goalie, but Catholicism is not a sport and Catholics are not part of a team!”

While I am not equating my Master's Hockey team with the Catholic Church, I am saying that Christianity is not a mere personal philosophy for isolated individuals, but the Catholic Church is a community of people chosen by God and united as brothers as sisters in the Body of Christ. As such, God has hand-picked each one of us to join His team, to join His Church, and you have freely accepted His invitation. So teammates, reflecting on the Scripture readings that we have just heard, I invite you to join me in a run through Salvation history in my homily tonight, a journey that will weave us through the story of creation, up the hills of Moriah, through the streets of Jerusalem and all the way to Lawrence Avenue and Sixth Street. I promise, this journey will not take as long as running a marathon!

In the beginning, "God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them." In today's first reading we encounter this visual reality that God has made man and woman in his own image, after his likeness. God has crafted each of you and given you everything that you need to be an active member of his team. After God creates many of the creatures in His world, He then says four simple words, "be fertile and multiply." One of the important aspects of God's

team is the reality that Catholicism should be shared and multiplied through evangelization. Our society wants us to keep our faith to ourselves. Our secular culture discourages Christians engaged in the work force from telling anyone that they are members of the Church. This reading challenges us to tell the world that we are members of this team, to recruit new teammates in order for Christ's Church to grow.

As a goalie, I am constantly being put to the test by my opponents, seeing if they can shoot the puck past my leg pads, stick or gloves. In our second reading from the Book of Genesis, God puts Abraham to the test. God blessed Abraham, stating, "I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars in the sky." Before this blessing, God asks Abraham to take his only Son, Isaac, to a mountain in the land of Moriah. Imagine for a moment, Abraham and Isaac hiking up the rocky terrain of Moriah, possibly with wind in their face, exhausted, and while climbing, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his only son. Knife in hand, Abraham goes to do as God desired and suddenly an angel appears saying, "I know how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your only beloved son."

Being a member of a team is often challenging and being a member of God's team in today's society is often very difficult. We may get pucks to our face masks in the form of being assigned to work with co-workers who are often negative, we are called to stand up for those who do not have a voice, we are sent to a foreign city without family or friends or we are even ridiculed for teaming up with Christ. On God's team we will be tested, but despite these challenges, we see in Abraham's story the importance of remaining loyal to God's team.

Your presence here tonight says to the Body of Christ that you have decided to remain as part of Christ's team. In this *quid-pro-quo* society, we naturally look to find the benefit of every action. We join gyms and get discounts, free personal training sessions and even free t-shirts. Today's Epistle points us to the reality of what happens when we fully commit our lives to follow the Life of Christ. The Epistle tells us, "just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life." Because of Christ's Resurrection, members of His team will have the ability to share in the newness of Christ's life through the Resurrection. Remaining loyal to Christ's team is not easy because we can be sidelined by the dynamic of sin. The Epistle addresses this reality

stating, "We know that our old self was crucified with Him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin." Christ's Resurrection frees us from being slaves to sin, but we can sometimes place ourselves on the disabled list through choosing sin and not seeking God's mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Therefore, the Epistle is challenging us with a choice to choose Christ over sin, or as the text states, "you too must think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus."

Lastly, our run through today's readings takes us to the streets of Jerusalem on Easter morning. Two disciples are walking to the tomb and all of a sudden, in what must have seemed like an explosion, "boom goes the dynamite!" The Gospel says that there was a "great earthquake." An angel descended from heaven, rolled back the stone of Christ's tomb and sat upon it. The once mighty Roman guards were shaken with fear and suddenly they "became like dead men." The angel of the Lord addressed the two disciples and through the Gospel addresses us here today with the words, "Do not be afraid!" The angel invites them into the tomb and sends them forth to spread the Good News that Jesus was raised from the dead. These members of Christ's team were sent by the angel and charged with

the words "Do not be afraid!" Along the road they encounter the Risen Christ who says to them, "Do not be afraid." Fast-forward to October 22, 1978 and during the inaugural homily of his pontificate, Saint John Paul II proclaimed to the millions watching his words, "brothers and sisters, do not be afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power. Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, our journey through these readings leads us to four powerful words of the Risen Christ: "do not be afraid." As members of Christ's team, we will be given a life of true joy, but we will also have crosses to carry; still, we are told, "do not be afraid." On Christ's team we may be ridiculed by coworkers, laughed at by neighbors or even shunned by some family members; still, we are told, "do not be afraid." Tonight, the Lord reminds us to rededicate ourselves to His team, to focus our eyes and hearts on following Christ, all the while remembering, "do not be afraid."

The great earthquake of Christ's resurrection should shake us to the core, jolting us out of our sinful past to turn forever to the Risen Lord. Hearing the biblical accounts in our run through salvation history and opening our hearts to belief in the resurrection, we gather now at the

Lord's table, surrounded by a great "cloud of witnesses," our teammates,
"while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith"
(Hebrews 12:1-2).

May God give us this grace. Amen.