

**Homily on the Occasion of the  
125<sup>h</sup> Anniversary of Saint Michael Church  
30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle A**

**Sacred Heart Parish  
Effingham, Illinois**

**October 29, 2017**

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

Father Rosa, Reverend Fathers, Deacons, consecrated religious, parishioners of Sacred Heart Parish, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here to offer thanks to our Lord in celebration of the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of Sacred Heart Parish here in Effingham. Since 1892, Catholics in this community have found a home in which they could unite with each other in prayer and fellowship to journey together as disciples of Jesus Christ. The spiritual foundation laid so long ago continues to remain firm due to God's grace, which has made possible the many good works and sacrifices of so many who have preceded us. We gather, therefore, in this celebration of the Mass with a profound sense of gratitude for those gifts which we have received as we ask God's continued guidance so that we might continue to be good stewards of those gifts.

On an anniversary such as this, it is natural to wonder what life was like 125 years ago. Looking at our circumstances here today in the year 2017, the differences in our country and world, as well as our way of life, seem vast. In 1892, Grover Cleveland became the first American president elected to a second non-consecutive term in office; Ellis Island began accommodating immigrants to the United States; Rudolf Diesel applied for a patent on his compression ignition engine; Abercrombie and Fitch was established as an elite outfitter of sporting and excursion goods; Thomas Edison received a patent on the two way telegraph; Sir Frederick Arthur Stanley, Lord Stanley of Preston, announced his intention to present a bowl-shaped silver trophy to the “the champion hockey team in Canada,” which was named in his honor and is known today as the Stanley Cup; and here in Effingham, Illinois, Bishop James Ryan dedicated Sacred Heart Parish to serve as a spiritual home to the Catholic community.

As we look back on the founding of this parish and the lives of the people who have called it home over the past one hundred and twenty-five years, we have a unique opportunity to reflect on what it means to be followers of Christ through the viewpoint of those who have laid the spiritual foundation for this community.

We hear our Lord calling us to do just that in our readings today. He is calling us to see life from other vantage points and to learn from them. If we are to be true disciples of our Lord, we must treat others as we would want to be treated because we are all brothers and sisters in Christ and children of our heavenly Father.

The author of the book of Exodus reminds the Jewish people in the first reading from our Mass today that they too were an alien people living in the land of Egypt. Precisely because of their covenant with the Lord, they must not forget what it is like to be the outsiders. As a matter of fact, by virtue of their relationship with God, they are bound to love the most vulnerable people – foreigners, widows, orphans, and the poor – with the same the love that God shows to them.

This message is equally important for us to hear today, for if we are to be true disciples of our Lord, we must not lose sight of the fact that we are just pilgrims on a journey to our heavenly home. This world in which we presently live is neither our final destination nor our permanent home, so we must be ever cognizant as Christians of our obligation to go above and beyond the norms of how society calls us to treat others, for the Gospel ought to be our sole guiding norm.

Therefore, turning our attention to our Gospel reading for today, it should be evident that there is a very strong parallel to be drawn between the message of the author of the book of Exodus and the message of our Lord. As a matter of fact, Jesus draws on the wisdom of the Old Testament writers in responding to the Pharisees' question of what is the greatest commandment. First, Jesus quotes a passage from the book of Deuteronomy, which states: *you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength.*<sup>1</sup> But our Lord does not stop there; rather, He goes on to say that there is a second commandment that is also important which He draws from the book of Leviticus: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*<sup>2</sup> In drawing these two passages from the Old Testament, our Lord presents us with the reality that love of our neighbor is intricately intertwined with our love of God.

This combination of these two passages from Deuteronomy and Leviticus is not found before the time of Jesus. He gives us a new commandment by linking these two commands together. The uniqueness is in the combination and the declaration that the whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments. All other laws are derived from the love of God.

In the second reading that we heard today, Saint Paul commended the Thessalonians for turning from their idols to serve the living and true God. As we look at our own lives we should not fool ourselves into thinking we have no idols to which we devote our time and attention simply because we do not literally fall down and worship a golden calf. False idols come in many shapes and sizes. An example of one such false idol was mentioned by one of the Confirmation candidates just this past Friday at Christ the King Parish in Springfield. Prior to each Confirmation Mass, I send a questionnaire to all the candidates asking what receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation means to them and how they plan to live out their Confirmation commitment. In answer to the second question - how do you plan to live out your Confirmation commitment? - one candidate wrote, "I will give more of my attention to God than my phone." We all laugh, but this statement is profoundly true. As a realistic test of your love for God, ask: do you give more attention to God or to your smart phone?

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our Lord is telling us that if we are to be His disciples, our love of God must come first and foremost. He must be the true Lord of our lives. Moreover, we must not only love God, but we must also love our neighbors whom God made in His own

image. This is our great commandment. So, may we dedicate ourselves to living by this commandment ever more faithfully in our daily lives, not with a nebulous sentimentality, but with that total commitment in which we express our true devotion to God and service to those around us.

As we now continue our celebration of this Mass, we ask our Lord to nourish us with the sacrament that makes it possible for us to love both God and our neighbor, so that when our earthly pilgrimage is over, we might inherit our eternal dwelling place in Heaven. In this Eucharist, we bring to the Lord our gratitude for all of the gifts that we have been given, especially the gift of this parish. We are grateful also for the vocations of the priests and religious sisters that have come from this parish and those who have served in this parish, and we pray for more young people to have the courage and strength to say yes to God's call to follow Him and serve His Church. May the Lord expand our hearts through the reception of the Eucharist, so that we might willingly and joyfully commit ourselves to the discipleship and stewardship way of life, thus continuing to build on the firm foundation which has been established for us.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 19:18