

**Homily for the 150th Anniversary of
Saint Michael the Archangel Parish**

**Saint Michael the Archangel Parish
Staunton, Illinois**

December 9, 2017

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Father Radosevich, Reverend Fathers, Deacons, consecrated religious, parishioners of Saint Michael the Archangel 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 fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Saint Michael the Archangel Parish here in Staunton. Since 1867, Catholics in this community have found a home in which they can join together 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. Therefore, let us join together 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 150 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 1867 Andrew Johnson was the 17th president of the United States, Nebraska was admitted as the 37th state in these United States, and William H. Seward, the Secretary of State, purchased Alaska for a sum of 7.2 million dollars. Also in 1867, the first elevated railroad began service in New York City, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was established, and here in Staunton, the first Catholic church to serve the community of faith in this area was dedicated under the patronage of Saint Michael the Archangel.

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 fifty years, we have a unique opportunity to reflect on what the members of this parish have done to lay the spiritual foundation for this community. In this regard, our scripture passages today draw a strong parallel to this, for in our readings we see the foundation being laid, not for one community, but rather for the coming of our Lord and the eventual founding of the Universal Church.

In the first reading, we heard the author of the book of Isaiah reminding the Jewish people that the Lord is faithful to His promises, in particular, His promises to lead them to the land of Israel and to send the Messiah. The prophet speaks of the voice crying out in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord," and goes on to tell them to make straight a highway for God, for the glory of the Lord would be revealed. In essence, the prophet is telling the Jewish people to prepare a way for the Lord to work in their community, in their lives, and in their hearts.

This message is equally important for us to hear during this Advent season, since, if we are to be true disciples of our Lord, we too must examine our lives and find the areas that we could make straight or fill in. I do not mean this in the literal sense, but in the sense of the areas that we can improve our relationship with God and those around us. Let us not lose sight of the fact that we, like the Jewish people to whom the prophet was speaking in our reading, are pilgrims on a journey. While our journey may not be to a physical place like the Promised Land, we are all pilgrims on the journey to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Turning our attention to our Gospel reading, it should be evident that there is a very strong parallel to be drawn between the message of the

author of the book of Isaiah and the message that we hear at the beginning of the Gospel according to Mark. Indeed, the Gospel writer refers to Isaiah the prophet and even reminds his readers that the prophet told of a voice crying out in the dessert. However, he does not stop there. Mark tells of John the Baptist, the precursor of Jesus, and his role in preparing the way for the Lord. John's lifestyle and preaching inspired the people of his time to follow him and be baptized. While John was a powerful preacher and leader, he never lost sight of pointing people to the One who is greater than he, who would come after him and baptize them, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, if we are to be disciples of our Lord, we must not only be precursors like John, but, just as John the Baptist took and expanded on the message of the prophet Isaiah, we must also expand on his message and live as witnesses to the grace of Christ at work in our lives. By virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation, we have the obligation to make our faith in Christ known in our words and deeds, and so show other people the way to Him.

Unlike the time period in which John the Baptist lived and preached where the Jewish people were awaiting the coming of the messiah, today

our world does not seem to await anything at all; rather, it is blinded by the here and now.

Yet, the beginning of this Advent season is precisely a time of waiting. From the first Sunday of Advent until December 17, our focus is on awaiting the second coming of Our Lord, when he will come to judge the living and the dead. During the last week of Advent, our focus will be on the impending celebration of the first coming of our Lord at Christmas. But the fact that we do not know when Our Lord will come again should not lull us into complacency and make us inattentive to what we must do to prepare for His coming again in glory. For this reason, it is good to recall the reminder from the Second Letter of Saint Peter that we heard in today's second reading: "Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard 'delay,' but he is patient with you." Just as Our Lord is patient with us, we must patiently await His Second Coming at the time of His choosing. In the meantime, we are called to build up the community of faith and live patiently in harmony with one another.

Therefore, as we formally declared at the conclusion of our Diocesan Synod last month, our mission is to build a fervent community of intentional and dedicated missionary disciples of the Risen Lord and steadfast stewards of God's creation who seek to become saints. Accordingly, as the local community of Catholic faithful, we must be committed to the discipleship and stewardship way of life as commanded by Christ Our Savior and as revealed by Sacred Scripture and Tradition.

As we continue our celebration of this Eucharist, let us 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. In particular, we express our profound gratitude to Father George Radosevich, who has served with dedication as your Pastor for the past thirty-two years! We pray for more young people to say yes to God's call to follow Him and serve His Church. May the Lord expand all of our hearts through the reception of the Eucharist so that we might willingly and joyfully commit ourselves to living as Christ's disciples each day of our lives, thus continuing to build on the firm foundation which has been established for us. May God give us this grace. Amen.