

**Homily for the Blessing of the Chapel
HSHS Holy Family Hospital
Greenville, Illinois**

August 29, 2017

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

Reverend Fathers, deacon, consecrated religious, doctors, nurses, administration, and staff, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ. It is good for us to be here today as we ask our Lord to send down his blessing upon this chapel and upon the people who will come here to seek solace and consolation amidst suffering. I am very grateful to the Hospital Sisters of Saint Francis and to all those from the Hospital Sisters Health System for your dedicated efforts in transitioning hospital to its new identity as a Catholic hospital, now known as HSHS Holy Family Hospital.

The establishment of a hospital chapel such as this and the provision of pastoral care are key markers of our Catholic identity in keeping with the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Health Care Services*, issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops¹. Some people who have not read this document may think that the ERDs, as they are called, are mainly about Catholic hospitals not performing abortions or contraceptive

sterilizations. While those provisions are certainly in the ERDs,² there is much more about the very essence of Catholic health care in this document. Part Two of the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Health Care Services*, for example, is entitled, "The Pastoral and Spiritual Responsibility of Catholic Health Care." In this section, the Bishops state:

Since a Catholic health care institution is a community of healing and compassion, the care offered is not limited to the treatment of a disease or bodily ailment but embraces the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of the human person. The medical expertise offered through Catholic health care is combined with other forms of care to promote health and relieve human suffering. For this reason, Catholic health care extends to the spiritual nature of the person. "Without health of the spirit, high technology focused strictly on the body offers limited hope for healing the whole person." Directed to spiritual needs that are often appreciated more deeply during times of illness, pastoral care is an integral part of Catholic health care. Pastoral care encompasses the full range of spiritual services, including a listening presence; help in dealing with powerlessness, pain, and alienation; and assistance in recognizing and responding to God's will with greater joy and peace.³

Directive number 12 of the ERDs then states more specifically, "For Catholic patients or residents, provision for the sacraments is an especially important part of Catholic health care ministry."⁴ This chapel will play a major role in providing the sacraments and offering a sacred place where

those who are suffering from various pains and afflictions may come for spiritual nourishment, comfort and healing.

It is fitting that we pray for those who are suffering on this feast day of the Passion of Saint John the Baptist. This memorial observance is sometimes also referred to as the "Beheading of St. John the Baptist," recalling the actual historic event of the execution of Saint John the Baptist by order of King Herod. The reference to the "Passion of Saint John the Baptist" calls us to focus more on the depth of his emotional suffering than simply on the physical aspect of his decapitation.

We here in the United States and particular in Springfield, Illinois, know about death by assassination. On April 14, 1865, while attending a play at Ford's Theater in Washington D.C. President Abraham Lincoln was shot in the head by well-known stage actor named John Wilkes Booth just as our country's Civil War was drawing to a close. The following day, April 15th, President Lincoln died and the nation was thrown into mourning following the first assassination of a president of the United States.

For my generation, Friday, November 22, 1963, is a day that will forever remain in our memories. At 12:30 in the afternoon, while the

Presidential motorcade was making its way through Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas, shots rang out and killed President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. The nation and world were in shock at the brutal killing of our president.

These as well as other horrific assassinations are embedded in the collective memory of people throughout the world, for through the history of the human people, great men have been killed for standing up for what is right and challenging the political or social norms of their time.

Today, as the Church recalls the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, we remember John not only as a gifted preacher that many people flocked to the river Jordan to hear, but also as the first true prophet of the Lord in many years. Saint John the Baptist was not afraid to preach what specific individuals needed to hear, given their particular circumstances in society. He spoke to common people, politicians, soldiers, religious leaders and even to King Herod himself. Through his message and his austere way of life, he courageously bore witness to the coming of the Messiah and the need for repentance.

The history of the Church shows time and time again that those who closely follow the teachings of our Lord and seek to call others to follow those teachings will also encounter difficulty and at times even share in the

suffering of our Lord on the Cross in their own lives. To be true disciples of Christ, there are no easy routes or shortcuts, rather, we must seek to follow the truth of the gospel in our own lives and invite others to do so as well.

While I hope that none of you are called to pay the ultimate price for your faith through physical martyrdom, as did Saint John the Baptist and countless other souls that have given their lives in fidelity of Christ, we are called to follow their example and live as Jesus' disciples in the midst of the world today, even in the face of hardship and suffering.

During a general audience at Castel Gondolfo on this feast in 2012, Pope Benedict XVI addressed those who were present with the following words:

St. John the Baptist also reminds us – Christians in our own times – that we cannot give into compromise when it comes to our love for Christ, for his Word, for his Truth. The Truth is the Truth; there is no compromise. The Christian life requires, as it were, the “martyrdom” of daily fidelity to the Gospel; the courage, that is, to allow Christ to increase in us and to direct our thoughts and actions.⁵

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, may we always seek to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel through our actions and our words.

Whether it is to challenge societal norms with love in hopes of bringing about a culture that seeks to build up treasure in heaven rather than on earth or whether it is to bring the comforting presence of our Lord to those who are ill or suffering, we are called to live as Christ's disciples in the world today.

So, as we bless this Chapel and designate it as a place for the celebration of the sacraments as well as personal prayer, may it be a place that you come to often, to receive the grace that our Lord desires to give to you, so that you so that you may overcome the challenges of following in the footsteps of Christ and that you might courageously bear witness to Him as His disciples.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ethical and Religious Directives for Health Care Services*, Fifth Edition, November 17, 2009.

² *Ethical and Religious Directives for Health Care Services*, nos. 45-48 and 52-53.

³ *Ethical and Religious Directives for Health Care Services*, quoting from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Health and Health Care: A Pastoral Letter of the American Catholic Bishops* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1981).

⁴ *Ethical and Religious Directives for Health Care Services*, n. 12.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, Castel Gondolfo, August 29, 2012.