

**Homily for the Respect Life Mass and Rosary Walk
September 23, 2017**

**Holy Family Parish
Granite City, Illinois**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers and deacons, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here at Holy Family Parish to celebrate this Diocesan Respect Life Mass on this feast day of St. Pius of Petrelcina, also known as Padre Pio. When I was Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, my Titular See was in Vulturara, Italy, near San Giovanni Rotondo, where Padre Pio spent fifty years in the monastery there and where he is now buried. In 2010, just a few months before I was appointed Bishop of Springfield in Illinois, I had the opportunity to visit my Titular See and pray at the tomb of St. Pius of Petrelcina. During his years at the monastery he was much sought after as a spiritual advisor, confessor and intercessor. His life was devoted to the Eucharist and to prayer. In our Eucharist today, we seek his intercession for our pro-life efforts. The theme for the 2017-2018 Respect Life Program in the United States is, "Be Not Afraid," for Jesus says, "Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the

age” (Matthew 28:20). May we not be afraid to speak and act boldly but confidently to protect human life from conception to natural death.

After Mass we will peacefully and prayerfully march to the Hope Clinic Abortion Facility to witness to the dignity of all human life and to implore the assistance of God in bringing about the conversion of hearts for all of those who contribute in any way to promoting a culture of death. As part of our prayer at the abortion facility, I will offer “Prayers of Supplication and Exorcism” as we seek through the power of Christ to drive away the evil influences of the devil, the prince of world of sin.

In leading these prayers, I wish to make clear that these “Prayers of Supplication and Exorcism” are not the same as a major exorcism, where the devil or demons are exorcised from a person who is possessed. I am not suggesting that anyone at the Hope Clinic abortion facility is possessed by the devil. Nevertheless, we are all objects of the devil’s temptations, and a minor exorcism is simply renouncing any relationship with the Evil One, as we do whenever we renew our baptismal promises. As noted in the ritual book, *Exorcisms and Certain Supplications*, “The presence of the Devil and other demons appears and exists not only in the tempting or tormenting of persons, but also in the penetration of things and places in a certain

manner by their activity, and in various forms of opposition to and persecution of the Church.”¹

As we walk towards the abortion facility, we will pray the rosary, asking our Blessed Mother for her intercession to end the scourge of abortion here in Granite City and throughout our diocese. We will ask her for the grace to turn hearts hardened by selfishness and pride to place their hope and trust in God and His gift of life.

Can you imagine how different things would be if our Blessed mother had not cooperated in God’s plan of salvation? What would have happened if Mary had rejected our Lord’s call for her to be the mother of Jesus? While neither of these scenarios is true, they should cause us to pause and reflect upon our Blessed Mother’s acceptance of her role to be the mother of Christ. In the time in which Mary lived, it would have been almost unheard of for a young unmarried woman to be pregnant, and if such a woman would be pregnant, it would carry serious social ramifications. However, as we know, our Blessed Mother, the first and model disciple of Christ, despite what society might think, heard the call of our Lord and opened herself to the working of the Lord in her life to become the mother of His son.

In our Gospel today, we hear a well-known parable. While it is familiar to us today, it seems to have perplexed those who heard our Lord teaching. If we look at this passage from the Gospel of Saint Luke through the lens of our Lord speaking about the various groups of people whom He encountered in His ministry, then, perhaps we can more easily connect it to our lives today. In describing the various scenarios where the seed falls on different patches of ground with varying results, Jesus first describes the circumstances that will result in failure before going on to the promise of the good ground. These failures are not meant to discourage us, but to foster the hope that everyone might eventually become good ground where the Word of God will flourish.²

When considering how this applies to our lives, the question that we must ask ourselves is: “Into which group do we fall?” Are we in the group of people who hears our Lord’s call to discipleship and don’t understand it, so we ignore it? Are we in the group who hears our Lord’s call to discipleship and get excited at first but then as the excitement fades go back to our old ways? Are we in the group that hears our Lord’s call to discipleship but chose the goods that the world has to offer us rather than the spiritual goods that come from lives of discipleship? Or are we in the

group that hears our Lord's call to discipleship and responds with hearts that are open to receive the grace necessary to follow Him as true disciples?

It is my hope that like our Blessed Mother, we can all answer that we fall into the last group, those whose hearts are open to receive the grace to live authentic lives of discipleship in the midst of the world. For if we live as Christ's disciples and proclaim the Gospel of Life through our words and actions, we are certain to aid in the building up of a culture of life, one that respects life from conception to natural death in the midst of a world that rejects this respect for life.

In one of his most well-known encyclicals, *Evangelium Vitae*, our late Holy Father, Pope Saint John Paul the Great, looked at length at the sacredness of human life from conception to natural death. At the conclusion of this great work, our late Holy Father directed our attention in our fighting for life to our Blessed Mother, for she is the true model disciple to whom we can look for direction on how we might live as Christ's disciples in our daily lives and how we should go about building up a culture of life in the midst of the world.

So, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, may we always strive to model our lives after our Blessed Mother. In doing so may we not only

receive the word of God, but nurture it by our faith so that we can proclaim the Gospel through living as Christ's disciples. So we pray:

O Mary,
bright dawn of the new world,
Mother of the living,
to you do we entrust the cause of life
Look down, O Mother,
upon the vast numbers
of babies not allowed to be born,
of the poor whose lives are made difficult,
of men and women
who are victims of brutal violence,
of the elderly and the sick killed
by indifference or out of misguided mercy.
Grant that all who believe in your Son
may proclaim the Gospel of life
with honesty and love
to the people of our time.
Obtain for them the grace
to accept that Gospel
as a gift ever new,
the joy of celebrating it with gratitude
throughout their lives
and the courage to bear witness to it
resolutely, in order to build,
together with all people of good will,
the civilization of truth and love,
to the praise and glory of God,
the Creator and lover of life.³

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *De Exorcismis et Supplicationibus Quibusdam / Exorcisms and Certain Supplications*, (International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 2013), Appendix I, no. 1.

² Cf., St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on St. Matthew's Gospel*, 44.

³ Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 25 March 1995.