

**Homily for Monday of the Sixth Week in Ordinary Time
February 12, 2018**

**St. Joseph's Home
Springfield, Illinois**

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

Reverend Fathers, consecrated religious, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I am happy to be with you again this year so near to the memorial of Saint Valentine. I hope that my presence with you today is a sign of remembering you in my prayers and of my gratitude for the many prayers you have offered for me and for my ministry as your Bishop.

We sometimes forget that the color red is associated with St. Valentine's Day because Valentine died as a martyr. Valentine was a holy priest in Rome, who assisted the martyrs in the persecution under Claudius II. He was apprehended, and sent by the emperor to the prefect of Rome, who, on finding all his promises to make him renounce his faith ineffectual, commanded him to be beaten with clubs, and afterwards, to be beheaded. He was executed on February 14, about the year 270. Rather than celebrating some sort of romantic sentimentality, I suggest that it would be

more appropriate on St. Valentine's Day to focus on the sacrifices that true love demands of us.

As circumstances of our calendar would have it, such self-reflection is even more appropriate this year as the Lenten season begins for us with the celebration of Ash Wednesday on February 14th. Therefore, not only do we have the witness of great sacrifice by Saint Valentine, but we also have the tradition of sacrifice that the Church has observed during the forty days of Lent throughout Her history.

Martyrdom does not refer only to the ultimate sacrifice of giving one's life for the faith, but includes the many other large and small ways that we die to our own desires and wishes out of sacrificial love for God and neighbor. I do hope that each one of you will examine what sort of sacrifice you can make or perhaps are already making during the upcoming Lenten season that will allow your love for Christ and your commitment to live as His disciple to become ever deeper. Without sacrifice, our love for the Lord remains empty or even unfulfilled. In fact, one of the most powerful ways that we can unite ourselves to Him is through uniting our sacrifices to the sacrifice that He made for us on the Cross. While giving up a favorite food or drink, a particular meal, or

something we enjoy doing such as watching our favorite television show pales in comparison to the sacrifice our Lord made for us in laying down His life on the cross, these mortifications do give us the opportunity to offer up our discomfort by dying to ourselves so that we may draw closer to Him. As we heard in our first reading from the Letter of Saint James, "Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we prepare to enter into this period of penance during the season of Lent, may the sacrifices you make bring you closer to our Lord in this life so that you might spend all eternity with Him in the life that is to come.

May God give us this grace. Amen.