

**Our Lady of Good Counsel Women of Distinction Awards Mass
Springfield Diocesan Council of Catholic Women**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

June 16, 2018

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

Reverend Monsignors and Fathers, Deacons, members of the Springfield Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ; it is good for us to be here as we celebrate this Mass during which several women will receive the Our Lady of Good Counsel Women of Distinction Award.

As we celebrate the virtues and achievements of the exemplary women who will be honored this morning, it is fitting to tell a story about the world-renowned physicist, Albert Einstein, who was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of every passenger. When he came to Einstein and asked for his ticket, Einstein reached in his vest pocket. He couldn't find his ticket, so he reached in his trouser pockets. It wasn't there. He looked in his briefcase but couldn't find it. Then he looked in the seat beside him. He still could not find it.

The conductor said, "Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it." Einstein nodded appreciatively. The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned around and saw the great physicist down on his hands and knees looking under his seat for his ticket.

The conductor rushed back and said, "Dr. Einstein, Dr. Einstein, don't worry, I know who you are; no problem. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one." Einstein looked at him and said, "Young man, I too, know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going."¹

Perhaps you can relate to Einstein metaphorically, in that you cannot find your ticket and you have no idea where you are going in life. Or perhaps you could take this story one step further: perhaps you are not even sure who you are in relation to others and to the world.

Knowing who we are and where we are going is integrally linked to one of our deepest needs: the need to belong. We need to know where we belong, that is, we need somewhere where we feel accepted, included, wanted; somewhere where we fit in; somewhere where we know we are not alone. The need to belong is so much more than just a part of Abraham

Maslow's well-known *Hierarchy of Needs*, it is at the core of who we are as human beings.

In fact, people often go to great lengths in order to belong: joining various organizations, participating in team sports, being involved in book clubs and other groups that focus on common interests. While all of these are good things, at times we seem to forget that it is not so much about where we belong; the most important thing is to whom we belong, and that is our Lord. If we take this to heart and allow it to shape who we are as Christian disciples, when we realize that we belong to Christ and He loves us more than we can even begin to comprehend, we must inevitably share that conviction with others whom we encounter in our lives.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, there is no more perfect model for us of knowing to whom we belong than our Blessed Mother, for she is the first and greatest disciple, having given her entire self to the Lord in loving service to Him.

While we could certainly point out a myriad of instances from her life that bear witness to the fact that our Blessed Mother is the perfect model of Christian discipleship, her place as the first disciple further points to how we must respond to the Lord if we are to be His disciples. We see this first

instance of discipleship even before the birth of Jesus, at the moment of the Annunciation. In the Gospel according to Luke we read: *Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."*² These very words, our Blessed Mother's "yes" or her "*fiat*," as it is called in Latin, is the first and most authentic act of discipleship that we see in the scriptures. Her whole-hearted "yes" and giving everything that she was and everything that she had over to our Lord in His service is at the core of our understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

We too are called to echo these words and actions in our daily lives. It is our obligation to give each day everything that we are and everything that we have to our Lord and commit to serving Him. I know that at times this can seem like a daunting task, but just as Mary had faith despite her fears, so too must we have faith in spite of our limitations or fears.

Whether that *fiat* in our lives is to serve Him in our parishes, in our communities, or in our families, our Lord calls us to bear witness to His love to those whom we encounter in our lives.

Another key point in her life that bears witness to Our Lady's role as the model of discipleship is that of her presence throughout Jesus' passion and death, during which her Son, the Lord of Life, was beaten, spat upon,

and hung on the altar of the Cross as He offered Himself so that we might have eternal life. On a very human level it is not be hard to imagine that Mary would have experienced many of the emotions that any parent would experience if the child they loved was treated in such an inhumane way. However, where many parents would have been pleading for mercy on behalf of their child, our Blessed Mother, recognizing her part in salvation history and her role as a disciple of our Lord, once again turned herself over to His will. Despite the heart-wrenching pain of what she witnessed, she gave control over to the Lord, once again surrendering her will so that He might bring to completion what He had come to do.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, our honor for our Blessed Mother as the first and greatest disciple is not something we give simply from a distance. This is because our Lord, while He was on the cross, gave us one of the greatest gifts that He could give us: seeing His mother and the beloved disciple John at the foot of the cross, He gave his mother to John, and through John to all of us, so that she might be our mother and guide. Sacred scripture tells us that from that time on John took Mary into his home, and so too should we take Mary into our homes through a sincere devotion to our Blessed Mother. For if we foster a relationship with Mary

and model our lives after the life of Our Lady, then will we grow in love and relationship with our Lord as His disciples.

So, as we honor these women for their lives of faith and discipleship, we entrust them and ourselves to Mary as our mother, who guides us with her good counsel, that she might draw us ever closer to her son. In this way, we will be given the grace to live as true disciples and always give our full “yes” to whatever God calls us to do.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ http://www.stltoday.com/suburban-journals/illinois/patti-amsden-rev-billy-graham-s-new-suit/article_0ee93adf-8ecb-5d7b-9997-3eaca972c842.html

² Luke 1: 38