

**Homily on the Occasion of the
180^h Anniversary of Saint Alexius Parish**

**Saint Alexius Church
Beardstown, Illinois**

July 14, 2018

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Father Meyer, Reverend Fathers, Deacons, consecrated religious, parishioners of Saint Alexius 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 eightieth anniversary of the founding of Saint Alexius Parish here in Beardstown. Since 1838, Catholics in this community have gathered 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 of those who have preceded us. We come, therefore, to this celebration of the Eucharist with a profound sense of gratitude for the gifts we have received as we ask God's continued guidance, so that we might continue to be committed disciples of our Lord and good stewards of His abundant gifts.

On an anniversary such as this, it is natural to wonder what life was like one hundred and eighty years ago. Looking at our circumstances today in the year 2018, the differences in our country and world, as well as our way of life, seem vast. In 1838, Martin Van Buren was president; Samuel Morse publicly demonstrated the use of the telegraph for the first time; the New Orleans Mint produced its first coins: ten dimes; the Iowa Territory was created, which contained land that would later become a portion of the states of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Iowa; future abolitionist Frederick Douglass boarded a train in Maryland on his way to freedom from slavery; Duke University was established in North Carolina as the Brown School; and Reverend J.B. Raho arrived here in Beardstown, Illinois, and began to minister to the people of this area. He wrote of his work in the community in the following words: "I discovered about two hundred Irish Catholics scattered around a radius of sixty miles. I visited them on foot carrying with me a carpet bag containing everything necessary for the celebration of Holy Mass and the administration of the Sacraments."

As we look back on the humble beginnings of this parish and the lives of the people who have been part of its history over the past one

hundred and eighty years, we have a unique opportunity to reflect on what it means to be missionary disciples of our Lord.

Quite appropriately, our readings today focus on what it means to be a missionary disciple of Jesus Christ. The Gospel reading in particular points to this important work of the Church.

It is quite clear in Mark's Gospel that Jesus did not intend to carry out His mission alone. Rather, from the very beginning His ministry was to be collaborative. To this end, we see our Lord sending the disciples out, two by two, to proclaim the word and confront unclean spirits.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, just as He sent the Twelve, our Lord sends us out to proclaim the Good News in our daily lives. While this may seem like a daunting task, our Lord gives us a "roadmap," if you will, or a set of directions on how to do this. I would like to call your attention to two points from our Gospel today that may shed some light on how we are to go about proclaiming the Good News in the midst of the world today.

First, our Lord tells the disciples to travel light. There is a certain urgency to the work of discipleship, so baggage must be kept to a minimum. In a literal sense, our Lord told the Twelve to take no food, no sack, and no money. Rather, they were to take only a walking stick, the

sandals on their feet and a tunic. This does not mean that the disciples were to be destitute, instead, they were to rely on the hospitality of those to whom they were ministering. While we are not sent out under the same circumstances that the Twelve were, we are still called to discard the “extra baggage” of sin from our lives so that we might be models of Christ’s love to those around us and build-up the kingdom of God here on earth.

The second point from today’s Gospel reading to which I would like to call your attention is the fact that the disciples are instructed to stay put. In fact, Our Lord tells them to enter a house randomly and stay there until it is time to leave. This might seem like a peculiar thing to say, but what our Lord was conveying to the Twelve is that they were not to shop around for the best accommodations or the most agreeable people. Rather, they were to accept whatever was available to them.

Most of us today are not entering strangers’ homes and imposing on their hospitality in an attempt to build up the Church. In fact, if you were to try this, it might even have the opposite effect. However, our Lord calls each of us to accept the many gifts that we have been given and use them for the sanctification of the world. Let us, like the saints who have gone before us, commit to giving everything that that we are and everything that

we have to our Lord so that we might be true missionary disciples of Christ.

As we now continue our celebration of this Mass, may we 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 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.