

Homily for the Bishop's Gift Society Mass

August 17, 2018

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

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here to celebrate this Mass as we ask for the Lord's blessings on our diocese. In particular, I welcome the members of the Bishop's Gift Society to celebrate this Eucharist in which we offer our greatest form of thanksgiving to our Lord in gratitude for the many blessings that our He has bestowed on us as a diocese and as individuals this past year.

Over the years in the course of my marathon training, I have often been caught in the rain. If it is raining before I go out or if it looks like rain is imminent, I can postpone my training run until later. But sometimes the rain does not start until I am several miles out, and then all I can do is just keep running and enjoy the cool shower! In the situations of everyday life as well, at times the decisions that we have made lead us so far down a certain road, that the only thing left to do is live with the consequences.

This, however, is never the case with God. No matter what we do or how far we turn from God, how much we sin, or how many wrong roads we turn down, there is always time to turn back. There is always forgiveness and reconciliation with the Lord, because He has made a covenant with us, and God is always faithful to His word.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this lesson is at the very heart of today's Gospel, and it is an important message for us to hear as members of the Church living in the midst of the world today. Our Lord's teaching on the permanence of marriage is found in His actions as well as His words. His teaching about the indissolubility of marriage points to the reality of our Lord's relationship with the Church, since Christ the bridegroom will never abandon His bride, the Church.

In light of the recent news of allegations of sexual misconduct by clergy in the State of Pennsylvania and by former Cardinal, now Archbishop, Theodore McCarrick, our justifiable anger may make it hard for us to recognize our Lord's love and care for the Church. Nevertheless, we must remain convinced that Christ has not abandoned us, and so we must not give up on our commitment to live as His disciples. We must recognize that this is exactly what Satan wants, for he is the prince of darkness. He wants us to

turn our back on our Lord and His Church. On the contrary, we must use this unfortunate set of circumstances to commit ourselves to live ever more fully for Christ as His disciples.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, what is needed now more than ever is a profound spiritual renewal at all levels of the Church. We cannot allow ourselves to be deceived by the Devil, the father of lies, into thinking that this is just a problem of the clergy. The sexual revolution of our secular world has obviously infected the Church at all levels. We recently observed the fiftieth anniversary of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which prophetically and accurately predicted the hazards of artificial birth control. Yet polls show that the majority of Catholics continue to reject the Church's teaching on contraception. A 2016 study by the Pew Research Center found that only 13% of weekly Mass-going Catholics thought contraception was morally wrong. More and more couples cohabit before marriage or even without marriage. There are also Catholics who do not consider adultery and homosexual activity to be sinful. Clergy as well as lay people have far too easily rationalized why and how the Church's moral teachings on sexuality and chastity do not apply to them, resulting in the scandalous situation in which we now find ourselves.

The answer is for all of us to recognize that we are called to be saints and therefore to commit ourselves to take the Church's teachings seriously and pray that we may be able to make the sacrifices necessary to grow in holiness with the help of God's grace.

We must dedicate our energy to grow in holiness by living as disciples of our Lord each and every day of our lives. All of us, married couples as well as single individuals, bishops as well as priests, deacons and consecrated religious, must commit ourselves to grow in holiness each day. This will truly happen only when we develop a deeper love for the God who made us and who continues to sustain us on our journey throughout life.

Just as when we love somebody or something, that person or object becomes the center and focus of our lives, so too are we called in our relationship with God to put Him above everyone and everything else, so that He is our everything. It is out of that love that we will desire to respond as His disciples. Following Jesus out of a sense of obligation, duty, or fear of punishment will only take us so far. Eventually, we will hit a wall and decide not to go any further or even give up altogether. But with love, there are no limits to how much we will give of ourselves in order to follow Him.

We will be intentional disciples to the extent that we have an authentic, loving relationship with Him. That love of God then opens our eyes to something other than ourselves. It opens our eyes to see Christ in our brothers and sisters, even when it is difficult, and motivates us to love them as He loves us.

As we prepare to receive the greatest expression of God's love for us in the Eucharist, we give thanks to God for the love that He has shown us in this diocese up to this point. We look forward to the many ways in which that love will continue to grow through our generous response to that love by living as disciples and good stewards of His many gifts. Let us all pray that our love for God and neighbor will grow through the reception of the Eucharist, so that we can go forth from this Cathedral to spread the flame of that love from person to person, leading more and more people to embrace that love on the path to becoming saints.

May God give us this grace. Amen.