

Homily for the Diocesan Respect Life Mass and Rosary Walk

September 29, 2018

**Holy Family Parish
Granite City, Illinois**

**†Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
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, after which we will peacefully and prayerfully march to the Hope Abortion Clinic to give witness to the dignity of all human life and to implore the assistance of God in bringing about the conversion of hearts of all of those who in any way are complicit in promoting a culture of death. Today, we celebrate the feast of the Archangels: Saints Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, and ask their intercession in this task.

As we think about these great archangels, some may wonder how we talk about what we believe exists, but cannot see, what we perceive, but cannot touch. The post-Christian world in which we live struggles to understand the spiritual realities that lie beyond the confines of what we can

observe with our senses, and yet through faith we know that they are there. In response to this ambiguity, our society has turned to creating caricatures depicting popular notions of angelic images and consumer goods featuring overly-sentimentalized ideas of what angels are.

A Gallup poll in 2016 indicated that 72% of respondents believe in angels.¹ This wide-spread belief in angels is apparent in popular culture. Images of angels are on greeting cards, in magazines, made out of candy and even appear on television. However, there is an enormous gap between this depiction and their true reality. St. Thomas Aquinas taught that angels are “intelligences not destined to be united to a body, and thereby differ from the human soul. According to St. Thomas, they are not composed of ‘form’ and ‘matter,’ but are subsistent forms, each differing from the other and forming a species in himself. From their immateriality follows that they are by nature immortal and incorruptible; having neither extension nor dimensions they cannot be in a place, but can move and act on material beings by applying their power to the place in which they want to be.”²

Despite the fact that 72% of respondents to the Gallup poll indicated their belief in angels, it is puzzling that, according to the same poll, only 61% believe in the devil. I say it is puzzling since the devil is simply a fallen

angel.³ So if a person believes in angels, it is only logical that he or she should also believe in fallen angels, or devils.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we cannot fail to remember that the earth is inhabited by many different spirits, some good and some evil. As we heard just a few moments ago in our reading from the Book of Revelation, a great battle took place in heaven, wherein evil is confronted by good.⁴ More specifically, Saint Michael, the leader of the forces of goodness and truth, led the other good angels in battle against the ancient serpent, also known as the Devil or Satan. In the end we hear that that Satan and his followers were cast out of heaven, for there was no place for them there.

Just as in this initial battle of good versus evil, so also has Saint Michael come to the aid of those who struggle against the spiritual forces of wickedness that have attempted to corrupt and destroy the people of God throughout the ages. The spiritual assistance of Saint Michael is especially needed in the battle against the scourge of abortion and the culture of death. According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, in the 18-year period from 1999 to 2016, while there have been zero executions, there have been 783,878 abortions performed in Illinois, for an average of 43,549 every year. Abortion is clearly the most pressing pro-life issue demanding our attention.

Let us work and pray for the day when the number of annual abortions in this state will be zero.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we have been praying the Prayer to Saint Michael after Masses in this diocese since shortly after my installation as your bishop in 2010. Recently, in light of the sinful scandals that have recently come to light, several dioceses across the country have announced that they will also be praying the Prayer to Saint Michael after Masses, including the Archdioceses of New York, Kansas City, and Portland in Oregon, as well as the Dioceses of Madison, Wisconsin, Birmingham, Alabama, and Bridgeport, Connecticut.⁵ Joining our prayers with our fellow Catholics elsewhere, let us forever turn toward Saint Michael and beg his intercession in conquering the evil of abortion and all the other evils that exist in our society today.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/193271/americans-believe-god.aspx>.

² *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1974), s.v. “Angel.”

³ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 1974), s.v. “Devil.”

⁴ Rev 12:7-12ab.

⁵ <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/sixth-u.s.-bishop-promotes-st.-michael-prayer-after-mass-in-response-to-abu>.