

Homily for the Principals' Leadership Conference Mass

April 12, 2018

**Saint Viator Chapel
The Catholic Pastoral Center
Springfield, Illinois**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good for us to be here today, during this Principals' Leadership Conference for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. I express my gratitude to all of you for the important work that you do in your role of leadership in the area of Catholic education, whereby the young people of our diocese are formed to be disciples of our Lord. Much of your attention on a daily basis is directed toward the service of others. It is therefore important to have an opportunity like this to take some time for your own formation so as to be more effective leaders of those to whom you have been called to serve.

Throughout the Easter season, we hear a great deal from the Acts of the Apostles. These readings recount for us many of the important events of the early Church that took place in the years immediately following the Resurrection of our Lord. These events provide much more than just a

historical account of those early years of Christianity. Rather, they provide many of the important lessons that are at the heart of the nature and mission of the Catholic Church, lessons that are just as applicable to the Church today as they were nearly two-thousand years ago.

The first reading for today's Mass provides us with a glimpse into what following the will of God and being Christ's disciples is really about. Following Jesus' death and Resurrection, the apostles are accused of preaching in the name of our Lord and told to cease doing so. But rather than caving to the will of society, in particular the court officials of that time, we hear of how Peter refused to stop and all the more testifies to his belief in Jesus and forgiveness of sin through Christ.

Peter and the other apostles serve as models for us for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that they remained obedient to the will of God, even to the point of risking their own lives. I know that, at times, it can be a challenge to live our Catholic identity fully due to the resistance of our society and, in many cases, resistance from students and parents. However, as leaders, we are invited to imitate the faith of the apostles and remain obedient, trusting that the Lord will not abandon us, but will reward us for doing what is right, even in difficult circumstances.

It is important for you, my dear brothers and sisters, as Catholic school principals, to consider how the fruits of your obedience to the Catholic faith impact the future of the Church. When you look at your individual school, you might think that the number is not all that large. But, if you take a moment to consider the number of students who have been formed in your school in the past, as well as how many interactions those students have had with others in their lives, the number becomes quite large. Indeed, there is a great opportunity to make a significant impact on a number of lives that far exceeds the number of students who fill the seats of our schools. By remaining faithful to the Catholic identity and the full teachings of the Church in the name of Jesus, you are preparing those disciples who will carry forth the gift of their faith and spread it throughout their community and even throughout the world.

The reality of the impact that our schools can have to touch so many people can be both exciting and intimidating at the same time. There is much expected of you as principals in ensuring that there is an environment that is conducive to the formation of our youth that is both authentic and faithful. The importance of this cannot be minimized and should never be treated as optional or secondary in any way. With that

responsibility, though, comes the grace necessary to fulfill that which has been entrusted to you. It is important to pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to guide you in your role of leadership, seeking the knowledge, understanding, and wisdom to know what is right, then asking for the fortitude necessary to put that into practice, even when we know it will be unpopular or difficult. By not backing off from what is right, the Lord will bless us and our students in ways that we may never see, but in ways that we trust will work for the betterment of our students, our schools, and our Church as we all strive to remain faithful to Him and His Church on our journey toward our Heavenly reward.

As we prepare to receive the Eucharist today, let us ask the Lord for the strength that we need to continue to persevere in being obedient to His will. May we constantly work to imitate the faith and trust of the apostles, as we lead the young people of our diocese to become disciples of Christ who will in turn be sent to fulfill the command of the Lord to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19) and so bring to fulfillment the promise of eternal life for all of God’s people.

May God give us this grace. Amen.