

**Homily for the Our Lady of Good Counsel  
Women of Distinction Awards Mass**

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

**Memorial of Saint Justin, Martyr  
June 1, 2019**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Monsignors and Fathers, Deacons, consecrated men and women, members of the 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.

At the outset, I ask that in our prayers today we include the praying for the common good of the State of Illinois. Illinois politicians in recent years have saddled our state with a series of serious evils, among them being taxpayer-funded abortion, same-sex marriage, and the widespread proliferation of video gambling. Late last night, shortly before midnight, the Illinois Senate approved Senate Bill 25, which, among other things, purports to declare abortion to be a fundamental right, requires private insurance to pay for abortions, and declares that an unborn baby does not have

independent rights under the laws of this state. When this bill, SB 25, passed the Illinois House of Representatives earlier this week, I called it “gravely immoral.” I noted that “Christians have rejected the practice of abortion from the earliest days of the Church. Children are a gift from God, no matter the circumstances of their conception. They not only have a right to life, but we as a society have a moral obligation to protect them from harm. Legislation that deprives children of legal protection before they are born, allowing for the murder of children at any stage in the womb, even up to the moment of birth, is evil.”

The Illinois General Assembly this week also approved legalizing the use of recreational marijuana. Government is supposed to provide for the common good. Instead, Illinois government, led by Governor J.B. Pritzker, Speaker of the House Michael Madigan, and Senate President John Cullerton, and their like-minded colleagues seem intent on driving Illinois deeper into a cesspool of immorality. Fortunately the legislature will adjourn after this weekend and we will at least get a brief respite from any further damage that our government might seek to inflict on the populace.

I know all of this is highly discouraging for people of faith, who wish our government would promote the common good instead of pushing our society deeper into the slime of corruption.

We need to remember that Jesus and the first Christians lived in the pagan Roman empire, where abortion and even infanticide were practiced. St. Peter said that we are strangers in a foreign land (1 Peter 2:11-12), and St. Paul reminded us not to be conformed to this world (Romans 12:2). We need to recognize that we are living in the midst of a neo-pagan culture and so we should pray for the heathens that are running our state government, entrusting them especially to the intercession of Saint Thomas More, a public servant who preferred to die at the hands of civil authorities rather than abandon Christ and the Church. May we also keep unborn babies and newborn infants, as well as all mothers, in our prayers and work to improve the dignity and quality of life of all people, especially the most vulnerable.

We also need to pray to our Blessed Mother for her intercession. Today, in a special way, we pray for the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary under her title as Our Lady of Good Counsel, a virtue and one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, which we desperately need in our world today.

According to tradition, the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel, presently found in the Italian village of Genezzano, which depicts the Madonna and the Christ-Child, has its origins in Albania. There, the faithful prayed to Our Lady of Good Counsel, particularly seeking protection from foreign armies and from religious persecution.

Beneath the Albanian fortress of Shkodra was a church dedicated to the Blessed Lady in which was housed an image of Our Lady, much-beloved by the Albanians because of the tender sweetness expressed through the image. With the advance of the Ottoman Turks, the faithful gathered before the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel, especially after the death of a great Albanian warrior in 1405 as the Turks marched toward Albania.

Several decades later, the only Albanian city not yet in Turkish hands was Shkodra. When the Turks laid siege to Shkodra, two Albanians were praying in the church when they saw the image of the Madonna and Child moving away from the wall. They followed it to Rome, where the image disappeared. Later they heard rumors that a miraculous image had appeared in Genezzano. They went to investigate and found their beloved image in the church of Our Lady of Good Counsel, built centuries before in

gratitude for the generosity of the people of Genezzano in the building of the Basilica St. Mary Major in Rome.

Some years before the arrival of the sacred image, the church of Our Lady of Good Counsel had fallen into great disrepair. A widow of the town, Petruccia, was moved to spend all of her remaining money to rebuild the church, in the process of which she ran out of funds. The people referred to this as Petruccia's Folly. But at 4:00 p.m. on April 25, 1467, the people heard the sound of great music and saw a strange cloud lower upon the church. When it lifted, one of the unfinished walls of the church had been destroyed, but the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel was inside. When Petruccia heard the bells calling the townsfolk to see what had happened, she fell down in tears before the image.

A little over a century later, with the Catholic Counter-Reformation taking place in Italy and throughout Europe, the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel became a symbol of lay involvement and responsibility in the Church. Petruccia, a laywoman, responded to the need that she saw in her local church. She did not wait for the religious or members of the clergy to take action in ensuring that the situation was not ignored. As a result of her response, many women's groups throughout the Church have adopted the

patronage of Our Lady of Good Counsel for their groups, that they too might imitate the awareness and generosity demonstrated by Petruccia.<sup>1</sup>

Those of you who are being recognized today as Women of Distinction have followed the example of Petruccia in your own local parishes and communities. Your eyes have seen the needs of the Church and others around you and you have responded with the gifts that the Lord has entrusted to you. You have allowed yourselves to be instruments of God's love and mercy by not turning away from those situations and individuals around you.

The timing of this Mass is a very appropriate one, for just yesterday we celebrated the Feast of the Visitation of our Blessed Mother to her cousin Elizabeth. In that Feast we witness the actions of our Blessed Mother as she demonstrates her attentiveness to the needs of those around her and her reaction to those needs. After learning of Elizabeth's pregnancy from the angel, our Blessed Mother, moved with charity, hurries to assist Elizabeth with her household chores. Her desire to assist her cousin reveals to us one aspect of Mary's interior life, namely, her disposition of humble service and selfless love for whoever needs her help.

Over the course of the last month, we have honored our Blessed Mother in a special way as we do each year during the month of May,

but the month of May cannot end. It has to continue in our life, because our veneration and our love we have for her, the devotion to Our Lady cannot disappear from our hearts, but rather has to grow and express itself in a witness of Christian living, fashioned according to the example of Mary.<sup>2</sup>

Those of you receiving the Women of Distinction Award today are recognized for your witness to Christian living fashioned according to the example of Mary. However, we can all learn from our Blessed Mother and through the countless ways in which the Lord invites each of us, every day, to take our attention off of ourselves and to look to the needs of others, responding with the charity modeled by the Blessed Virgin.

As we continue this Eucharistic celebration, let us prepare to receive our Lord into our hearts once again so that we might more readily respond to the needs of those around us, as these ladies have done. May we bring all of the needs of the Church to Our Lady of Good Counsel, asking that she intercede on our behalf before her Son in order to provide for those needs, thus strengthening the entire Mystical Body of Christ as we journey together toward our homeland in Heaven. May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Frisk, Jean, *Our Lady of Good Counsel*, The Marian Library / International Marian Research Institute, Dayton, OH. <http://campus.udayton.edu>.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Homily*, 25 May 1979.