

**Homily on the 125th Anniversary of the Death of the
Venerable Servant of God Augustine Tolton
St. Peter Cemetery
Quincy, Illinois**

July 9, 2022

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

Reverend Fathers, Deacons, dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good for us to be here today at the grave of the Venerable Servant of God Augustine Tolton to offer the Holy Mass on this 125th anniversary of his death. We have gathered at his grave because Mother Church holds him up as one worthy of our respect because of his heroic virtue in living the Christian life. But because he has not yet been raised to the dignity of the altars, we have gathered at his grave to ask the Lord that Augustine Tolton, his servant and priest, may “gaze on the LORD’s beauty” with the angels and the saints (Psalm 27:4). We know that Augustine was chastised more than a little throughout his life and so we gather today to implore the Lord God not only to bring him into his heavenly home, but also to give us some sign he has done so, particularly through a miraculous healing attributable to his intercession (cf. Wisdom 3:5; Psalm 27:4).

It is our love for good Father Gus that brings us together today, to make this pilgrimage to the grave of this holy priest. As we do so, we ask the Lord to allow us to imitate the virtue we see exemplified throughout the life of Father Tolton.

Chief among Augustine's virtues is the virtue of patience, or what the late Father Roy Bauer was fond of calling "long-suffering." King David encourages each of us to practice this virtue when he says, "Wait for the LORD, take courage; be stouthearted, wait for the LORD" (Psalm 27:14)! As a boy, Augustine certainly showed a courageous patience when he lived in slavery and when he was taunted by some of his classmates and their parents. As a young man, he showed courageous patience as he was refused acceptance into seminaries and religious communities one after another here in the United States, which fortuitously resulted in his being sent to study for the priesthood in Rome. As a priest, he showed courageous patience when he endured the persecution of one who was supposed to be a priestly brother, which may have been motivated by racism or clerical envy, or both.

In all of these difficult and painful situations, his stout heart paved the way for compassionate love to prevail, just as it did in the life of our Master, Christ Jesus. From his birth until his death, Augustine Tolton suffered with

Christ and because of his union with the Crucified Savior we pray that he will “may also be glorified with him” (Romans 8:17). Here we have to ask what it means to be glorified with Christ.

To be glorified with Christ is to share fully in the Paschal Mystery, in the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Lord Jesus. Each of us has already died and risen with Christ in the saving waters of baptism and have received a share in his divine life. For Father Tolton, this occurred on May 29, 1854, at St. Peter’s church in Brush Creek, Missouri. His sharing in the Paschal Mystery began that day, and now we await the Church’s declaration that it will certainly be completed when the Lord comes to raise us all from the dust of the earth.

If we are to imitate the virtue of Father Tolton, we, too, must seek to be united to the sufferings of Christ throughout our lives so that we might also be glorified with him. A most important way for us to be united to sufferings of Christ is to imitate the courageous patience of Father Tolton, especially in a society that is so quick to rage.

There is unquestionably no shortage of occasions for each of us to practice this same virtue of courageous patience in our own lives. Opportunities for long-suffering abound in our families, in our places of

employment, in our schools, and in society generally. What is needed for us is that we be stout-hearted and wait for the Lord, as Augustine did.

Living lives of courageous patience will, by God's grace, produce in us that same compassionate love that led Father Tolton to welcome whoever came to him, from the greatest to the least brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus (cf. Matthew 25:40). Father Gus' own day was marked by deep divisions within this nation, some of which have begun to heal, but are still in need of much healing. In our own day, other divisions are become ever wider and are in need of being bridged. Whatever the division, Father Tolton shows us the way forward, the way to advance the coming of the Kingdom of God: courageous patience marked by compassionate love in the manner of the only Redeemer of mankind.

As Bishop of this local Church, I urge each of you to strive to follow Father Tolton's virtues in your own lives, so that the Gospel may take greater hold in each of our hearts and throughout our nation. I also ask you to continue to ask Father Tolton's prayers for those who are gravely ill, so that the Lord God may grant a miraculous healing attributable to his intercession. Then we will know Father Tolton to be not simply Venerable, but also Blessed (cf. Matthew 25:34). May God give us this grace. Amen.