

**Homily for the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Little Flower Parish, Springfield, Illinois**

**Mass for the 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C | August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022 AD**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good for us to be here today to celebrate together the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of your parish. My first thoughts today are of thanksgiving to all of you for everything, big and small, that you have given to this parish over the past three-quarters of a century. How much history has happened in the world, and even just here in Springfield over those years! I look forward to hearing some of the stories you have from this parish as we continue our celebration after Mass today, but lest I get off track reminiscing about what this parish has done since 1947, I know there is someone else we must extend gratitude to today, and that is Our Lord. As grateful as I am to all of you, few of you have supported this parish through all of its 75 years, and none of you has carried the Church through its almost-2000 years of history... but Christ, our King, has done just that!

As we meditate on the scripture readings that the Church has given us today, we find a consistent call to *perseverance* in our life of faith. Usually, during moments of celebration like this, we easily forget the hard times that

we had to endure to get here, but it seems that today Our Lord is reminding us that carrying forward our faith in Him is not always easy!

Consider Jeremiah. As the Babylonians approached the walls of Jerusalem, he was the only prophet to speak authentically for God and tell the people to surrender. Giving up, when exile is the consequence, is never a popular opinion, but Jeremiah had spoken again and again that the sins and unfaithfulness of the Israelites would have consequences, and to surrender to the Babylonians, now, was actually their best way back to God. To keep fighting, or to turn to Egypt for help, or to look for another way out, was to remain stubbornly unrepenting of their sins, and would be a futile attempt at continued self-dependency. They had tried their own way for so long, now Jeremiah called them to put themselves into the hands of God. Yes, there would be sufferings because of their sins, but God would bring them back to the blessings of the Holy Land once that purification had taken place. Lest I neglect to mention, we should notice that Jeremiah himself suffered his own consequences for voicing this call of God: he was thrown in a cistern to die, and his life was saved only by the timely intervention of someone in the king's court who remained faithful. We too, when we voice

the call of God to our homes, or parishes, or cultures, will often find it is not the most popular message!

Yet, God's message to us is not just "repent, turn back to Me!", He also beckons us to follow Him down the path of the cross that He has already traveled before us. The Letter to the Hebrews uses the image of a running-race, with the competitors making their final lap around the stadium, surrounded by those who have already run the race, and keeping their eyes fixed not so much on the finish line, but on Jesus Himself. "Let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2). I have run a number of marathons and other races over the years, and sometimes the miles get very hard, and by the end you can be in a good bit of pain, but if you have crowds cheering you on, and especially if you have someone to run with, even the hardest miles become possible. Similarly, Jesus has "endured the cross" before us, so when we find ourselves similarly tested - needing to repent of our sins, or to sacrifice ourselves to do God's will, or suffering a time of loss, or when

we are called to speak truth when it is not popular ... whenever we carry the cross, we are assured that we do not run alone!

I find a similar message, at first challenging, but then deeply consoling, in Jesus' words to His disciples in the Gospel. He tells them of a second baptism that he must endure: a baptism of fire and anguish, the baptism of the cross. And then He says that they will go through it too. "From now on a household of five will be divided, three against two and two against three" (Luke 12:52). As followers of Jesus, we should not expect to avoid the cross leaving its mark on our lives and families either. I suspect most of you have members of your family that you are distant from because you have chosen to prioritize Jesus, and they have chosen not to. This is a place of great pain for many families; I have felt it with some of my relatives too. Jesus does not offer us an easy solution today, He simply, and sadly, tells us that those who are faithful to Him will be rejected for their continued faith. He tells us what being a disciple will cost, and then asks if we will choose Him.

The thing is, God never forces us to choose Him. Plenty of Israelites did not follow Jeremiah's word, plenty of Christians have also given up the race half-way through, and plenty of Jesus' disciples then, and now, turned

away at the prospect of losing family or friends, but many have remained faithful! The reason that we celebrate 75 years here today is because ordinary Catholics from this parish, decade after decade, generation after generation, persevered as best they could in faith in Christ, and passed on their knowledge of Him to the next generation. We pray today not only in thanksgiving for their diligent devotion and His persevering love, but also for that gift of final perseverance for ourselves as well.

To close, I simply recall an anecdote from your patron saint, St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Many people know her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, and something about her “little way” of offering small sacrifices as little acts of love to God, but she also wrote hundreds of letters that we also still have. One of the final ones, when she was dying from tuberculosis at the age of 24, is to a priest she often wrote to, Fr. Bellière, on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1897. “Dear little Brother, I am now all ready to leave; I received my passport for heaven, and my dear father is the one who obtained this grace for me. On the 29<sup>th</sup> he gave me the assurance I was soon to join him; the next day, the doctor, surprised at the progress the sickness had made in two days, told our good Mother that it was time to grant my desires by having me receive Extreme Unction.

I had this happiness, then, on the 30<sup>th</sup>, and also that of seeing Jesus-Victim leave the tabernacle for me, whom I received as Viaticum for my long voyage! ... This Bread of Heaven fortified me; see, my pilgrimage seems to be unable to end. Far from complaining about it, I rejoice that God permits me to suffer still for His love; ah! how sweet it is to abandon oneself into His arms without fear or desire." [Letter 263, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, August 10, 1897]

We too face the daily grind, many temptations to turn aside from Jesus, and we may endure our own share of sickness too, but Jesus is with us also. Let us persevere in His grace today, and every day of our lives.

May God give us this grace. Amen.