

**Homily Outline for Principals' Leadership Day Mass**  
**Wednesday of the 5<sup>th</sup> Week of Lent**  
**Saint Francis Church at the Evermode Institute**  
**Springfield, Illinois**  
**April 6, 2022**

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**Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

- I. Our Fourth Diocesan Synod was held in 2017.
  - A. Why are we still talking about it five years later?
    1. A diocesan synod is not a one and done deal.
    2. It sets the strategic path and pastoral direction for the indefinite future—certainly for the remainder of my tenure here as diocesan bishop.
  - B. The first five synodal declarations pertain in a special way to Catholic education.
    1. Declaration 1 – Diocesan Mission Statement
      - a. The mission of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is to build a fervent community of intentional and dedicated missionary disciples of the Risen Lord and steadfast stewards of God's creation who seek to become saints. Accordingly, the community of Catholic faithful in this diocese is committed to the discipleship and stewardship way of life as commanded by Christ Our Savior and as revealed by Sacred Scripture and Tradition.
      - b. To further this mission, the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is committed to implementing the Four Pillars of Discipleship and Stewardship, namely:
        - i. **Hospitality** – to **invite** people proactively to join us in prayer, especially Sunday Mass;
        - ii. **Prayer** – to **provide** well-prepared celebrations of the sacraments and other occasions for **prayer** as signs of hope and paths of grace to heaven;
        - iii. **Formation** – to **study** the Bible and **learn** more about Jesus and our Catholic faith; and
        - iv. **Service** – to **serve** each other, especially those in need, by practicing charity and justice.

2. Declaration 2: In the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, "all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness"<sup>1</sup> and will invite people to a life of discipleship and stewardship.
  3. Declaration 3: "The art of growing in God's grace is the key to growth in the Church. Building a culture of growth in the Church starts with inviting people to experience the love of Jesus Christ. . . . This growth looks not only to build up the number of followers of Jesus Christ, but also - and more importantly - for Christ's followers to grow in the depth of their relationship with Jesus Christ and in their commitment to observe all that he has commanded us to do."<sup>2</sup>
  4. Declaration 4: To be a disciple means to accept Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior.<sup>3</sup> Disciples are those who "make a conscious, firm decision, carried out in action, to be followers of Jesus Christ no matter the cost to themselves."<sup>4</sup> Catholic discipleship refers to a committed approach to living a Christian life within the Catholic Church.
  5. Declaration 5: Formation for discipleship and stewardship as a way of life shall be the primary focus of the catechetical programs in our Catholic parochial schools, high schools and parish schools of religion, as well as our faith formation programs for youth, adults and those with special needs, with sacramental preparation seen as a step in this process, but not the end of the process. Being a practicing Catholic must be taught as a way of life. Thus, religious education is a personal obligation that does not end with the reception of the sacraments, but continues into adulthood.
- C. Achievement in academics and athletics is important for our schools, but most important is that we form them to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.
1. We can measure math scores and language proficiency; we can even test for knowledge of the Bible, theology, and the Church's teachings, but this is not the test of discipleship. After all, even the Devil can quote Scripture!
  2. The depth of one's faithfulness as a disciple and commitment to the Lord is difficult assess, but we must try as best we can to instill in our students a love for Jesus and devotion to follow Him.

II. The Scripture readings for today's Mass underscore this point about discipleship.

- A. In today's Gospel passage (Jn 8:31-42), Jesus says, "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
1. Jesus measures true discipleship by remaining in His word, that is, being faithful to His teachings.
  2. We are called to teach the truth as Jesus did.
  3. Why? Because the truth will set us free, not freedom in the political sense or a license to do as one pleases, but true freedom as found in being free from sin.
- B. Today's first reading from the Book of the Prophet Daniel (3:14-20, 91-92, 95) tells how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast into the fiery furnace because they refused to worship the pagan god of King Nebuchadnezzar.
1. When the King saw that God saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego because they remained faithful to the one true God, Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent his angel to deliver the servants who trusted in Him; they disobeyed the royal command and yielded their bodies rather than serve or worship any god except their own God."
  2. In our world today, we rarely encounter demands to worship a golden calf or a pagan icon, but the gods that tempt people in our culture are more likely to be the allure of power, pleasure, or money.
  3. We are called to teach our children to follow the one true God, whom we are invited to receive into our hearts in this Sacrament of the Eucharist.

III. May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, "On entering the New Millennium," January 6, 2001, n. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Second Pastoral Letter of Bishop Thomas John Paprocki, *Ars Crescendi in Dei Gratia*, September 14, 2015, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *John* 3:16; *Acts* 2:38, 4:12; *Romans* 10:9, 13.

<sup>4</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, 1992.