

**Homily for the Annual Highland Knights of Columbus Mass
4th Sunday of Lent - Year C
March 27, 2022**

**St. Paul Church
Highland, Illinois**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good to be here with you today for the Annual Mass and Luncheon of the Highland Knights of Columbus Luncheon. This event supports vocations, pro-life activities, and campus ministry Newman Centers in Illinois. It also provides an opportunity for me to celebrate this parish Mass with you here at St. Paul Church.

This past Friday at Saint Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, on the Solemnity of the Annunciation, Pope Francis carried out a solemn Act of Consecration of humanity, and Russia and Ukraine in particular, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, entrusting the nations at war to the Blessed Virgin Mary in a special way. In response to the Holy Father's request that Bishops join him in this Act with the clergy, religious and lay Christian faithful, I led people in praying the Act of Consecration in our Cathedral in Springfield that same morning.

In his March 21st letter to Catholic Bishops around the world, Pope Francis wrote, “Nearly a month has passed since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine that is daily inflicting immense suffering upon its sorely tried people and threatening world peace. At this dark hour, the Church is urgently called to intercede before the Prince of Peace and to demonstrate her closeness to those directly affected by the conflict. I am grateful to the many people who have responded with great generosity to my appeals for prayer, fasting and charity. . . . This Act of Consecration is meant to be a gesture of the universal Church, which in this dramatic moment lifts up to God, through his Mother and ours, the cry of pain of all those who suffer and implore an end to the violence, and to entrust the future of our human family to the Queen of Peace.”

What does it mean to consecrate? Consecration makes something or someone sacred or holy by dedicating that object or person to God. An act of consecration is made ultimately to God with the understanding that our consecration is a serious commitment on our part to respond faithfully to God’s grace at work in our lives.

When a church or altar is consecrated, it is dedicated for divine worship and therefore is not to be used for a profane or secular purpose.

When a priest is ordained, his hands are anointed with Sacred Chrism, thereby consecrating them for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the administration of the Sacraments. When consecrating a country to Our Lady, we are consecrating the nation and its people to Jesus through Mary, imploring her maternal protection. As Pope St. John Paul II explained in his homily on May 13, 1982, “Consecrating ourselves to Mary means accepting her help to offer ourselves and the whole of mankind to him who is holy, infinitely holy; it means accepting her help – by having recourse to her motherly heart, which beneath the cross was opened to love for every human being, for the whole world – in order to offer the world, the individual human being, mankind as a whole, and all the nations to him who is infinitely holy.”

During the third apparition at Fatima, on July 13, 1917, Our Lady said to the three little shepherds that God wishes to establish the devotion to her Immaculate Heart in the world in order to save souls from hell and bring about world peace, and also asked for the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart. Thus, we pray together with Pope Francis, “Mother of God and our Mother, to your Immaculate Heart we solemnly entrust and consecrate ourselves, the Church and all humanity, especially Russia

and Ukraine. Accept this act that we carry out with confidence and love. Grant that war may end and peace spread throughout the world.”

Today’s Gospel passage that we just heard is one of the best-known and best-loved stories in the Bible. While it is generally called the parable of the prodigal son, the focus is not only on the prodigal son and his repentance, but also on the father and his mercy. In addition, the story could be called the parable of the resentful brother, since it is also about a brother who was very indignant about his younger brother’s self-indulgence and angry with his father for showing mercy towards him. Resentment has stolen his joy. He has been loyal to his father and his estate, an upright member of the community, and feels he deserves to be the sole inheritor of his father’s wealth.

The father’s mercy and love encompass both sons. He wants not only his younger son back, but his elder son as well. But will that elder son respond to his father’s plea or remain stuck in bitterness? This is not a story that separates the two brothers into the good one and the evil one. It is only the father who demonstrates goodness. He wants both to participate in his joy. “All I have is yours,” he says to the elder son. The father’s unreserved, unlimited love is offered wholly and equally. He does not compare the two

sons. He expresses complete love according to their individual journeys.

Today's parable teaches that God offers people a second chance. Jesus calls for repentance and assures us that it is never too late to turn around our lives to bear fruit in God's eyes. God does not give up on us when we do things that are wrong and will always forgive us if we truly repent.

God wants all sinners to return to Him. Like the father of the prodigal son, the priest in the confessional is there to welcome us home and invite us back to the banquet of the Eucharist. We do not have to be perfect to come home; we only have to be sorry for our sins and desire to love God more. We are all sinners who want to be more holy. If there is anything in your life that separates you from God, Lent is a good time to be reconciled and know the freedom of coming home to your loving Father.

May God give us this grace. Amen.