

**First and Final Profession of Vows and Reception into the Novitiate  
of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George**

**The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
August 15, 2012**

**Immaculate Conception Church  
Alton, Illinois**

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

Your Eminence, Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers and Deacons, Mother Regina Pacis and Mother Ingeborg, consecrated men and women, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today Holy Mother Church proclaims, “Let us all rejoice in the Lord, as we celebrate the feast day in honor of the Virgin Mary, at whose Assumption the Angels rejoice and praise the Son of God” (Entrance Antiphon). Yes, let us all rejoice!

How can we not be filled with great joy on this day as we witness the generous gift of self in the willingness of so many young women to say “yes” to God’s call? With this joy our hearts are also filled with profound gratitude, first of all to you, dear Sisters who today enter the Novitiate and make your first and final Professions in the consecrated life. The joy of the Lord is yours in a particular way as you look forward to the goal of your earthly pilgrimage, where Mary has already been taken.

Secondly, our gratitude goes out to the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George who provide for us a faithful witness to the joy that comes from following Christ Jesus. The reception of so many Sisters into your community is a clear sign of the Lord's blessings upon you and of the fruits of your apostolic work and evangelical zeal.

We are also grateful today to Father Jim Walther and his confreres and staff who have given us such a warm and hospitable welcome today in this church. May the Lord bless you for your kindness!

It is an extraordinary joy to receive the final vows today of thirteen Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George, as well as the first vows of three novices, and to initiate two postulants into the novitiate. Moreover, more than twenty-five women have visited this community within the past several months. Your community provides living testimony that authentic religious life still has great attraction for young women and will continue to be attractive for years to come, as it has been for centuries.

In addition this tremendous growth of vocations to the consecrated life with the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Martyr St. George, the number of seminarians for our diocese in the last two years has increased from eleven to twenty-six.

For this dramatic increase in the number of vocations to the consecrated life and seminarians for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, we naturally give great thanks to Almighty God, the Master of the Harvest, for sending laborers into his harvest (cf. *Matthew* 9:38).

We cannot and we must not grow complacent. We cannot look simply to an increase in numbers and say that our prayers have been answered. It is not enough to address the *quantity* of vocations, we must also work on the *quality* of our vocations. It would do no good to have an abundance of bad apples. Nor should we settle even for mediocrity. God wants the cream of the crop!

In his book, *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins says that “good is the enemy of great. . . . Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life.”<sup>1</sup>

He says that the steps from good to great follow a dynamic that involves disciplined people, disciplined thought and disciplined action.<sup>2</sup> I note that the word “discipline” comes from Latin, *disco* (which has nothing to do with a form of dancing in the 1970’s, but which means, to learn). It is also the root of “disciple.” Discipline is “training that corrects, molds or perfects the mental faculties or moral character.”

There is ancient Greek parable that says, “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows only one big thing.” The fox is a cunning creature, fast, sleek, beautiful, fleet of foot and crafty. The hedgehog is not so attractive, looking like a combination of porcupine and armadillo. As the fox plots his plan of attack, it would appear that the fox will be a sure victor versus the hedgehog. Sensing danger, the little hedgehog simply defends itself by rolling up into a small ball of sharp spikes. Seeing this line of defense, the fox knows he is defeated and retreats. Despite the greater cunning and swiftness of the fox, the hedgehog wins every time.<sup>3</sup>

The point is that the hedgehog focuses on what is essential and that’s what leads to his success. If we are to be successful, we

must also have a singular focus. By successful, I mean moving from good to great. By great, in the context of religious life, I mean to be *holy*. Your goal is not simply to be a good nun, but to be a saint. Achieving that goal requires a singular focus on the ultimate prize: eternal life in God's kingdom and serving Him to the best of your ability here on earth.

Dear Sisters, such a gift as you desire to make today lifts the heart and raises our thoughts to heavenly delights, even as today we rejoice in the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary body and soul into heaven. Soon, gathered at the Lord's altar, we will pray that our humble gifts "may rise up to God, and that Mary, who herself rose to glory, will intercede for us, that our hearts too may leap up, aflame with the fire of love."<sup>4</sup>

Is this not why you have come together today? Yes, your hearts, set afire with the love of God, have led you here where your holiness will be strengthened. In imitation of Mary who offered herself completely to the Lord - and thereby became his most perfect disciple - you have come on her feast day to likewise give yourselves to the Lord. You have come because you have heard his

call, “Hear, O daughter, and see; turn your ear, forget your people and your father’s house” and today you “are borne in with gladness and joy” (Psalm 45:11).

Through her obedience to the divine will, “Mary lifted herself up to such lofty heights of heaven that the Word reached down from the highest pinnacle of heaven and took her in.”<sup>5</sup> Because you desire the Lord to also take you in with Mary on the Last Day, look always to her and imitate her generous self-giving. She will teach you how to continually make of yourselves a fitting offering to the Lord and will teach you to say with her, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord” (Luke 1:38).

Perhaps more than ever, men and women today need to see the beauty of Catholic faith and life. You must, therefore, seek to make the merciful love of Jesus known by the manner of your lives. You must show to us that the Catholic way of life is not only reasonable but fulfilling and life-giving. We will look to you to see the truth of Jesus’ words lived out, in and through you: “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39). If you daily

conform your lives ever more closely to that of Jesus Christ you will indeed be able to rejoice in the Lord.

As you look to Mary to continually learn how to follow her Son, make her words your own: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked with favor on His lowly servant” and we ask Him to lead us to heavenly glory (Luke 1:46-48). And so we sing:

Hail, holy Queen enthroned above, O Maria.

Hail, Queen of mercy and of love, O Maria.

Triumph, all ye cherubim, Sing with us, ye seraphim,

Heaven and earth resound the hymn:

Salve, salve, salve Regina!

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, 90-91.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Esolen, *The Beauty of the Word: A Running Commentary on the Roman Missal* (New York: Magnificat, 2012), 391.

<sup>5</sup> Ambrose Autpert, *De Assumptione sanctae Mariae*, 4. In Luigi Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages: The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Thought of Medieval Latin Theologians*. Thomas Buffer, trans. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 50.