

**Curia Thanksgiving Mass
Catholic Pastoral Center
St. Viator Chapel**

November 20, 2013

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: last year, Hollywood released the movie, *For Greater Glory*, which recounts the story of the persecution of the Catholic Church in Mexico by the government in the 1920s. One of the more moving scenes from the film is when a young boy by the name of José Sanchez Del Rio suffers martyrdom for refusing to deny his faith. As he was led into the cemetery where he was to be killed, he was asked one last time to change his mind and so save his life. Instead, he responded with those famous words: "*Viva Christo Rey! Long live Christ the King,*" after which he was shot dead. In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI beatified this young man along with several other Mexican Catholic martyrs who preferred to suffer death than reject their faith in Christ and His Church.

We see something very similar taking place in our first reading from the second book of Maccabees. We have the story of a woman with her seven sons who were arrested and tortured for refusing to eat pork, which

was a violation of God's law for the Jewish people. In an attempt to get the youngest of these sons to concede to his requests, the king makes several promises with the hopes that he will be enticed by these earthly gifts. As in the case of Blessed José Sanchez, this young man responds boldly: "I will not obey the king's command. I obey the command of the law given to our fathers through Moses" (2 Mc 7:20). His fate was the same, suffering death for his refusal to deny his faith.

These are just two examples of many who have witnessed to their faith by remaining true to that faith even to the point of giving up their lives. Their witness provides encouragement to us when we feel the challenge of remaining faithful in the midst of opposition. They show us how God's grace comes to the aid of those who stand for the truth and are given the strength to persevere in doing what is right.

In our modern day, there is certainly no shortage of pressures placed upon us either to relax or outright reject our stance on issues of the faith. In moments such as these, we do well to recall the example of these saints, asking for their intercession to aid us in our struggle. It is timely that we reflect on this today which is, unfortunately, a very troubling day for our state. As you well know, later today, Governor Quinn will sign into Illinois

law the redefinition of civil marriage to include those of the same sex. This is clearly a violation of God's divine law and contrary to the teaching of the Catholic Church. For this reason, the Church rejects the government's abuse of power in permitting this legislation to become legal. To remain silent on this issue would be to betray our faith. We must have courage in standing firm, as did the martyrs, trusting that the Lord will continue to strengthen us so as not to not waver in our defense of the truth.

When the Church takes positions such as this, people may react and suggest that Jesus would not condemn people as the Church is doing. In many instances, Jesus did speak up in rather strong language, not to condemn people, but to help them by seeing the error of their ways so that they might return to the path of truth, the path that leads to their salvation. The Church, as a loving mother, continues to operate under this same principle, teaching and preaching the truth clearly and completely to prevent people from veering off the path that leads to Heaven. Contrary to those who might consider the action of the Church to be cold and hateful, there is actually nothing more loving that she could do than to provide this clarity and guidance for the people of God.

Today, we celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving, which may seem to be a little out of place on a day like today. In reality, even today is an opportunity for us to give thanks to God. In a particular way, we give thanks to Him for the gift of our faith which provides the path that will lead us to Him for eternity. We have no reason to be ashamed of what we believe. There is no need to apologize for any of the teachings of the Church. While many may be in opposition to those truths, we are confident that they are the sure teachings of Christ and that they are credible and worth following.

We thank God that He has called us to be stewards of this great gift, sharing it with the people of our diocese in various ways. I am personally thankful for all that you do to assist me in communicating this gift without error to the faithful entrusted to my care. In many ways, we have the joy of seeing how the faith has touched the lives of our people in a positive way. Those moments are true sources of encouragement for us. At times, however, we know that people are not always in agreement with how we serve them and their parishes. We must not let ourselves be discouraged by this, but continue to pray for the grace to be good stewards of all that has been entrusted to us.

As we prepare to receive the Eucharist, let us give thanks to God for the blessings of our faith and our Church, especially as we reach the conclusion of the Year of Faith. May our love of the faith continue to motivate us to stand firm in living and defending our faith, trusting that by doing so, we prepare ourselves, and those whom we serve, to hear those heartwarming words as the end of our earthly life: “Well done, my good and faithful servant...Come, share your master’s joy” (Mt 25:21).

May God give us this grace. Amen.