



Homily by Bishop Gregory Parkes: Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle May 6, 2018

Today we gather in our diocesan Cathedral, at parishes throughout our diocese, and in in our homes, to Consecrate the Diocese of St. Petersburg to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the founding of our diocese. In addition to consecrating the Diocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, many individuals throughout the diocese will also be making personal acts of consecration as well.

When considering the significance of this anniversary year, it was decided that the theme should contain the ideas of gratitude, joy, and hope. Specifically, to remember the past with gratitude, to celebrate the present with joy, and to look to the future with hope. In addition to various celebrations that will take place throughout the year, I expressed my desire that this anniversary year should also include a Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This seemed appropriate given the history of devotion to Blessed Mother in our diocese, the challenges faced in our world today, and our hope for the future.

We look to Mary with gratitude, joy, and hope – the themes of this anniversary year.

We look to Mary with gratitude for the role that she played in salvation history. Her “yes” to God’s will, her role as matriarch in the home at Nazareth, her devotion and faithfulness to her Son

during His public ministry and at the foot of the cross, and her motherly care for each of us are all reasons to be grateful.

We look to Mary with joy in our present day. On the cross, Jesus said to his mother, "Behold your son" (referring to John), and to John, "Behold your mother". We see in John a figure of the Church and of each one of us. Therefore, in this action, Our Lord entrusts John to Mary's motherly care, and entrusts Mary to John's care. The scripture continues, "And from that hour the disciple took her into his home." The fact that Mary is not only the Mother of God, but our mother as well, is certainly source of joy for us today. And we take her into our hearts and homes, and entrust ourselves to her care, through this Consecration to her Immaculate Heart.

And we look to Mary with hope. For she, being the first disciple and most perfect and faithful disciple of her Son, is with Him and with God the Father in Heaven. She is where we hope and long to be one day. And she, in her maternal care and concern, desires to help us through her intercession to achieve this end for which we were created. Our Blessed Mother desires nothing more than that we draw closer to her Son, and that we spend eternity with Him in Heaven.

St. John Paul II once stated, "*The Immaculate Virgin however invites us not to fix our eyes on her but to pass beyond, and as much as possible, to enter into the mystery in which she was conceived: the mystery of God who is One and Three, full of grace and fidelity. As the moon shines with the light of the sun, so the immaculate splendor of Mary is totally relative to that of the Redeemer. The Mother leads us to her Son; passing through her, we reach Christ.*"

This is certainly a reason for hope as we continue our journey in this world.

In the gospel reading from St. Luke which we just heard proclaimed, we hear the account of the Finding of Jesus in the Temple – the 5th Joyful Mystery of the Holy Rosary. Understandably, Mary and Joseph experienced great anxiety when they realized that their son was not among the relatives and acquaintances that were traveling with them. They return to Jerusalem to search for him. They find him in the Temple in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. While they are relieved at finding him, they did not understand that he needed to be in his Father's house. The scripture passage ends, "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart."

While Mary would come to understand why Jesus needed to be in his Father's house, she like any mother, was concerned when she thought her child was lost or separated from them. And Mary, our mother, has the same concern for each one of us. She wants each of us to remain close to her Son, and not to separate ourselves from God's love and mercy. The reality is that sin, so present in our world today, has the effect of separating us from the Father's love. We need Mary's maternal love and intercession to bring us back.

St. John Paul II in consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1984 prayed the following: *"And therefore, O Mother of individuals and peoples, you who know all their sufferings and their hopes, you who have a mother's awareness of all the struggles between good and evil, between light and darkness, which afflict the modern world, accept the cry which we, moved by the Holy Spirit, address directly to your Heart. Embrace, with the love of the Mother and Handmaid of the Lord, this human world of ours, which we entrust and consecrate to you, for we are full of concern for the earthly and eternal destiny of individuals and peoples."*

It is my hope and my prayer as your bishop, that this Jubilee year will be an opportunity for all in our diocese to be renewed in God's love and mercy, and to draw ever closer to Him through the Sacraments, most especially through the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And we turn to our blessed mother to be our guide in leading us closer to her son, Jesus Christ. We entrust ourselves to her Immaculate Heart that we may imitate her faith and virtue in our lives, and that we may bring her love to all – particularly to the poor, the outcast, the lost, the suffering, and the most hardened sinner. We ask her intercession upon our diocese and its people. May she lead us always to do God's will and to give glory to Him.

I conclude with words of St. John Paul II, "Let there be revealed, once more, in the history of the world the infinite saving power of the Redemption: the power of merciful Love! May it put a stop to evil! May it transform consciences! May your Immaculate Heart reveal for all the light of Hope!"

Amen.