

Sermon Given by Very Rev. John Berg, Superior General of the FSSP  
First Mass at the Site and Ground Blessing  
Regina Caeli Parish  
May 5, 2012

*O, God, from Whom every good takes its beginning, and having begun, increases in strength, grant we beseech Thee that what we are beginning for the glory of Your name may be preserved unto its end by the eternal gift of Your wisdom.*

Dear Reverend Father, dear friends and dear faithful of the Regina Caeli community, it's really an honor and really a great joy for me to be able to be back in Houston and here on the land for this beginning as the prayer says. As the Superior General of the Fraternity of St. Peter in these last six years, I've seen many different projects begin and many different invitations for our Fraternity, but I would say that here in Houston we are beginning with the most potential -- but beginning also with the bare minimum, both at the same time. It's a wonderful project for our Fraternity to be able to begin this parish on this land, and to begin this work here which is so much a part of the work of the Fraternity of St. Peter. It is really a blessing for me to be able to be here, say Mass for the first time here at what will be your future home.

The prayer that I read at the very beginning, "O, God, from Whom every good takes its beginning" is the first prayer that we will say before we begin the litany, before we begin the blessing of the land, and in a way -- in a certain particular way - this Mass today is a certain beginning, a beginning of this project. I know full well that it's not the absolute beginning, that there's a lot of preparation that went long before this date. There was preparation far before the Fraternity of St. Peter ever set its foot in the diocese of Houston. It began long before Cardinal DiNardo invited the Fraternity of St. Peter in 2006 to come if we could find a place to have a location. It began with people like Msgr. Golasinski at Annunciation, those priests who kept the flame of the Faith and Catholic orthodoxy alive -- so often in those difficult and darkest days, there were so few of them scattered throughout the world. It happened even before Father Van Vliet was invited to live with Father Lockey, to be at the parish and to begin those first Masses that you have already had at the Center.

But in a certain way, today is a beginning because it is marked out by the blessing of the land. That which God has begun always begins with a blessing, and sometimes it begins with much less than what we imagined that it will be in the future. Sometimes it takes a long vision to see the fruits that will eventually be there, and a lot of perseverance. We are not like angels after all. We are not those who simply need God and see Him face to face and dwell there. We live in an incarnate and in a created world. And in that way, this blessing is so important. It is taking a part of God's creation, this land which is here -- which He made, which came forth from His hand at the moment of creation -- and it is to build upon it, as grace builds upon nature, to make a home for Him. For the first time on this land, in so far as the first Mass is being said, it will be sort of a prefigurement of the church that you will have. There might be 200 or 250 of us here gathered, but at the moment of the consecration, there will be one more Person Who becomes really and

truly present under this tent. God will dwell, if even for a short moment, until the last Holy Communion has been received. He will dwell upon this land. And hopefully and in not too long, He will have a permanent home here to dwell in the tabernacle day in and day out, where people will come to pray and to adore the one true King, the One Who is our Creator and the Master of all life.

In order to make that a reality, the blessing is very realistic. It says not only is it a beginning, but in order to come to the end, God must begin the work, but we must cooperate with it and we must persevere onto the end, so that that which we have begun for the glory of His name we may persevere onto the end by the gift of His eternal wisdom. That grace of perseverance is something that we don't think of hardly enough within our own spiritual lives: how difficult it is to do the day in and the day out, to arrive at the arduous good. In the day and age in which we live, in which we want gratification to be there instantly, when we want to have everything right now and we constantly think that the next generation is even more impatient than the generation that we live in, it's important that we remember this virtue of perseverance – that the good which is profound, that the good which is there by grace, that the only good which gives true satisfaction finally -- is one which is often arduous, that it doesn't come easily, that it takes a long time in order for it to come about.

The grace of perseverance in the spiritual life is the same which is necessary in the perseverance for this project of having your own home. And really two things are necessary for this perseverance that we will pray for when we have this blessing. The first is to know and to understand what is the goal, and how good the goal is and therefore how worthy are the efforts to attain that goal. But second of all, it is to have an understanding of God's time rather than our own time, and the effort which he decides us to have rather than those perhaps that we would like to give. The first then is to understand the good which this place will once serve, all that comes from really having the parish, all that ought to be there from having a parish in the Extraordinary form here in the diocese of Houston, Texas. Oftentimes when I visit different dioceses and try to explain this to the faithful who have the Extraordinary form but do not have a parish, they don't even seem to understand the good which can be there because they have never been allowed to really live a parochial life and to have all of those elements which that entails, to see how good that is not only for their souls and for the souls of their children, but for the diocese in general, for the heaven that this community ought to be if it could only have that parochial life.

When I had the opportunity to meet with His Holiness, Benedict XVI, a couple of years ago, we had a long conversation. One of the first questions he asked me was, "Do you have any problems?" I said, "Yes, we have problems; there are certainly many things we can work on," and I was a little bit embarrassed by his question. But he quickly corrected the question and said to me, "Do you have any problems with bishops?" and I said, "Yes, we have a couple of problems with bishops". We made a little bit of a tour of the world, talking about different places in which it was difficult at that time – thanks be to God things have become easier – to really have the faithful have everything that they want and desire in the Extraordinary form. And the Holy Father said to me at the very end of the conversation, "Bishops must give you a true *cura animarum*, a true care of souls. There must be a parochial life for your priests in which they can give the faithful all the things which are necessary for their souls."

It means forming Catholics not to think that Catholicism is all about one hour on Sunday where you are shuttled into a church and shuttled back out, but it is all those different elements which are part of the Catholic life. That it is 24-7. That for your children, their Catholic faith will reflect upon on every single decision that they make in this life. It can only come about from a true parochial life, where there is not simply the Mass but all of the other sacraments. And not simply the other sacraments but also the preparation for them, for the different guilds, for the different groups for your children, for the different adult catechism which ought to be there, for an instruction within the faith – all of those different elements which form the good which is worthy of your efforts and which is worthy of your perseverance.

Our priests often tell me how fortunate they are to have the faithful that they have. To see their generosity often encourages us as priests to be generous as well. We can see the sacrifices that are made to have large families, to give a Catholic education in a day and age in which it is almost impossible to find a Catholic education at an institutional level. We know those sacrifices which the Church and God asks you to make, and it encourages us to be generous as well, to persevere, because the arduous good is one which is worthy of attaining and which is worthy of our perseverance.

The second factor is not only knowing the good that awaits you at the end upon this land, but it is also knowing that God's timing is often not our timing – that things often take much longer than we want. The Old Testament is a whole series of the prophets saying to God, "How long must we wait, how long must we go through the desert and wander before God will truly come, and when he will visit his people".

In this way, this celebration that we have of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the most fitting one for this blessing of this land, which is only a beginning. When we look at the heart of Our Lady, we see God's most persevering plan. From the moment in which He prophesized that the head of the serpent would be crushed by her foot, already from the very first sin of man, he had this prepared -- this great good for mankind -- this woman who would be the woman of all mankind, this heart which would be totally pure. For thousands of years God asked his people to be patient, to persevere, to wait, to strive. The moment was great indeed when it came, and that heart which was created totally pure, was indeed God's greatest moment in all of creation, after of course that of the Incarnation, in preparing a home which was perfectly fit for the dwelling place of God.

At the beginning of the Collect of the main prayer for today we said, "O, God, who didst prepare a fitting dwelling place for the Holy Ghost in the heart of the Virgin Mary". We need to recognize, and especially this community here of Regina Caeli, that indeed God desires to have a fitting dwelling place within your community, not simply a fitting home that is made of bricks and mortar, although that will be necessary because again you're not angels and you need a material home, but He desires to have a place which will be a fitting home also in the spiritual sense: that you can truly model your community after the heart of Our Lady, the Queen of Heaven. That it can be a fitting place for the dwelling of God, for indeed this God desires to dwell within this house and to dwell within this community, and to be the very center and the very heart of the community in general.

May this community that has now its beginnings truly come unto its end, that end which is intended by God, to arrive at a parochial life. May He give you the strength and the perseverance to model yourselves after the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady, and may you be like the Regina Caeli within this diocese. Our Lady the Queen of Heaven is invoked especially in the hymn that we will sing at the end of the day, the one that is reserved for the fifty days of Easter, the most joyous time where there's only joy in the Church's calendar, when the church never ceases to sing alleluia, and hopefully the children never cease to eat chocolate. According to those fifty days, we sing to the Queen of Heaven. May this community truly be a place and a point of reference, that others can look for a joy – a joy that is not superficial, the one that is offered by this world that never satiates and never satisfies -- but that joy which is profound, the joy of the saints that we will invoke in the litany, that has their Queen at the center.

Our Lady, Queen of Heaven, Regina Caeli, pray for us.

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost.

*Special thanks to:*

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