



**The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of
Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and Malta**
USA Associations

2020 Champion Virtual Pilgrimage

Opening Reflection of Most Reverend David L. Ricken, DD, JCL, ChC, Bishop of Green Bay
(transcribed from audio)

Mother of Mercy Hall, National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, Champion Wisconsin
Thursday, August 6, 2020

Good evening, everyone. And welcome. I know you're joining us from across the United States of America, maybe even from other countries. It's great to have you here virtually. I wish everybody could be here. We're in a brand-new building about a year old called the Mother of Mercy Hall here at the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help in Champion Wisconsin. Our Lady appeared here in 1859. This has the official approval of the Church. She actually did appear here to a young Belgian woman who was on her way to church walking through the forest. And Our Lady, Queen of Heaven, appeared here. Now Our Lady got the nickname, Our Lady of Good Help because she said, go into this forested land and take the Good News to the children and the families. And I will help you, do not be afraid.

That's a beautiful part of the message. And in many ways, there's still a lot of forested acreage here. Since the approval in 2010, we've gone from about 10,000 pilgrims a year to over 160,000 a year. And the Blessed Mother just keeps bringing people here because she loves all of God's children. She's our mother, she's the mother of the church. And she really loves having people come. The theme for this year's order of Malta pilgrimage is the family. And here tonight, I'd like to welcome you by meditating a little bit on the gift of the Holy Family. You know today and Our Lady, when she appeared in Fatima, told the children the last great attack on the Church will be to attack our families - our marriages and our families. That's the last big effort of the Evil One to try to come against God, to exercise his disobedience.

And we see that all around us. Don't we? So, your family, you're trying to live the faith. You're trying to pray together to stay together. As Father Peyton used to say, the family that prays together stays together. It's still true. It was always true. And especially when we focus on the Rosary. On really loving one another. Things just begin to happen. You know, my mother, she was a nurse, a registered nurse. And I know a lot of you women and the men too, perhaps, in the Order of Malta have nursing in your background. You love to provide healthcare. My mom was a tremendous nurse. She nursed in World War II. She was at Pearl Harbor in the second

group of Navy nurses that went into Pearl Harbor. But she always said, you know, a house is just a house until it's infused with love. After it's infused with love, it becomes a home. So, a home is a place where the family gathers in love. Now, love is very difficult to live out. If we're not connected to God, the way to be connected to God is through prayer.

You know, I like to start with Mary because she's ever vigilant, ever walking with us. All we have to do is be aware of Our Mother's presence. And when we pray together, especially the Rosary, it's the strongest weapon against all these attacks against the family. A very strong weapon is the Rosary. So, I encourage you as you see society kind of crumbling. All these attacks on the family. Don't listen to it. It's a distraction from the Evil One. We know that in the end, he's going to lose, but he's going to cause us a lot of problems on the way. This is a battle in heaven between the principalities and the powers. It's lived out here in the world in our time.

And it could be very apocalyptic in the sense that the devil wants to have his way. He's always been disobedient. That's his big sin - pride. He wants to be God, not be obedient to God. That's how we got to where we are, but we know he's not going to win the final victory. Jesus already won the final victory on the cross. He did that for you and for me, because He loves us. And because of His Mother's yes. His Mother's yes. We can invoke the Blessed Mother's protection, pray the rosary, which is the strongest weapon against the Evil One and have an assurance that her mantle of protection and love is around each one of us and around our families. Families are the very cells that make up the Church and also families make up society. In fact, so as goes the family, so goes the Church. So goes society. We have to accept our vocation, a beautiful vocation of really helping our families to grow in love together through the intercession of Mary and Saint Joseph and through walking with Jesus on this road of life and discipleship.

Secondly, I'd like to meditate on St. Joseph. This is a very special year for St. Joseph. Did you know this is the 150th anniversary of Joseph as the patron of the Universal Church? It was Pope Pius IX who named him that because the Church at that time, 150 years ago, was going through some very difficult challenges as well. You see on earth, there's always societal upheavals, every so many years. Wars, devastation, destruction. That's because this is not our permanent home, but the Lord wants to be right in the midst of our lives. And it gives us Mary and he gives us Joseph, the foster father of Jesus. In the diocese of Green Bay, we've set aside this year, especially in honor of Saint Joseph. You know, something funny, actually not funny, as it was kind of hard to take. But on the feast of Saint Joseph, the Worker, we began the year and the very next day, all this COVID stuff hit and the church had to go kind of dormant. Boy. I was so disappointed because I wanted Joseph to have the limelight for a while. We had plans, several special events to introduce him, reintroduce him to families that maybe didn't know much about Joseph. Well, Joseph obviously had another idea in mind. He was always quiet. We don't have one word of his in the Holy Gospels, but I wonder if maybe he wanted it that way. Or he

was sent by the Holy Trinity for this particular time, because he wanted to reinforce the call and the love of the family.

In our diocesan prayer, we have three sections to the prayer. If you don't mind, I'll share a little bit, section by section. "Good St. Joseph, as you led the Holy Family, watch over our families. Help our family and all families to know and share God's love. In our family relationships, may we find healing and seek to be holy. May our fathers help us to become faithful disciples of Jesus, who share our love for him." Isn't that beautiful? That's just the first paragraph. So, families are our primary intention during this year dedicated to St. Joseph. And St. Joseph is a powerful intercessor. You know, Dads, sometimes, you're so busy, or you were before all this pandemic, and it might be easy for you to forget the main things. The main things in life for you to love your wife, to make her the Queen of your household. And you'd be the King in proper balance and proportion. When you take care of her and you love your children, it's a winning combination. Can you do that alone? Not with all the stresses and pulls and things that happen to people today. But just ask St. Joseph. He is a real miracle worker.

Since we began this journey, I've personally had five answered prayers that I thought were impossible to be answered. I don't have time to share those today, but St. Joseph works so quietly. Yet, so generously. And dads, when men are being chiseled away without regard to the man's identity, the husband's identity, don't pay attention to that. That's from the Evil One. Listen to what God has in store for you. Your vocation as man, as husband, as father - it's noble, it's important. The Blessed Mother has walked with us and has helped us to take care of our women. Our wives, families, our mothers. But this year, we're really focusing on the role of the father because often the fathers are so neglected. So, Dads, you exercise your spiritual shepherding. Your spiritual fatherhood for your family. Draw your family together. Teach the children how to pray. It doesn't matter if it's distracted at home and things don't go quite right. Your intention and your action of bringing them together. That's, what's all important. And St. Joe's going to help you.

"As a foster father of Jesus, watch over all who serve as spiritual fathers. In a special way, bless our Holy Father, our bishops and our priests. May they follow your humble example in their fatherly care for the people of God." The church, you know, remember a few years ago, this scandal came out again and the discovery of people in high places doing very vile things. I think the reason that is, is because there was brokenness. There is still brokenness, but people lost, especially the priests and bishops and hierarchy, lost a sense of our vocation. We're not executive directors of an institution. We're pastors, we're spiritual fathers. We got off track. So, I ask you to pray for me and for all priests and bishops that we be humble, spiritual fathers. You know, I know, it's very popular to criticize bishops today. You know, I guess you can do that, but what a waste of time. You and I will be responsible for when we do that. To our own shepherds.

To our own authority figures. Are we perfect? By all means -No. That's why we need more of your prayers. Not less and not more criticism. You don't have to be blindly obedient but listen to the voice of the shepherd. There might be something in his voice that you don't know about yet. Pray for us.

Third: "With Mary, you raised Jesus, the High Priest. You know our need for priests. Please raise up good and Holy priests from our families to serve the people of our diocese. May our children and grandchildren hear and say yes to the call of Jesus, just as you and Mary did." No matter what diocese you come from, pray for vocations to priesthood and religious life. In this diocese, we don't have enough seminarians, but I know they're on the way. Our hope is that by 2025, we have 30 in the seminary studying. Right now, we have about 15. God is good. He's going to call young men to the priesthood. I know that. But he won't do that unless we really want them. We have to pray them up. Pray to the Lord of the Harvest - send workers into the harvest -and we're going to do it here. Why don't you do it there at home too? We need good, Holy priests. Not clerical-ized priests, not clerical-ized Bishops. Good, Holy servant leaders. Servant shepherds, who love their people. The way a good father loves his people. His family.

The third person, of course, of the Holy Family is the most important. The infant Jesus. As I've grown in my priesthood and the episcopacy over the years, I've grown to love the infant, Jesus. The infant Jesus of Prague. You know, Mother Angelica from EWTN. She had a great devotion to the Divino Niño. And the little infant works incredible miracles. If you develop a devotion to the Infant Jesus, it's incredible what He does. He's also very quiet, but He also has a lot of fun. According to Mother Angelica, she was in South America someplace and she went to a shrine and she had a vision when she was there of a little boy running all over the piazza. And he kept saying to her, "build me a shrine, build me a shrine, build me a shrine". She was obedient. She didn't know how it would be done. She went home to Hanceville, Alabama, and built, in obedience to the Holy infant, that beautiful shrine.

And so today, we need to pray to the Infant for the protection of children. The crimes that are committed against children today are horrendous. Trafficking. Abortion. Do you know, brothers and sisters, that this year since 1973, 65 million babies have been aborted in America. We have to repent and ask the Infant Jesus, the merciful heart of Jesus. This is why Jesus died on the Cross. This is why Our Lady is the Mother of Mercy. We need to get on our knees and repent for the crimes and evil we've done against humanity, especially against children. The Holy Family loves you. The Holy Family wants to pour grace and love into your home, into your family life. If some of your children or grandchildren have wandered away, don't give up. Pray for them.

Every day. Saint Monica prayed for her son for 33 years. He was a philosopher. He was into himself, very narcissistic. You know what happened? 30 some years later, he converted became

a Catholic and we know him today, historically, as Saint Augustine. Perseverance in prayer is incredibly important. Never give up. Every time you think of your child who might've wandered away from the faith, or maybe never even knew Christ, or never knew the Catholic Church, pray them back in. Don't give up. Be consistent every day, and be insistent, too, on asking the Lord with great faith. Bring Tom back in. Bring Sue back into the faith. Help them to see. Help them to be illuminated in their conscience. To see that God is here. This life is short, and they too are accountable for how they spend the days and weeks and hours and months of their lives.

So, I'm just kind of setting up the theme of the Holy Family. It's up to you to pray. Be open to the Holy Spirit and say, "Lord, what are we doing now that's not good and not of you. Help us to throw it out! Help us to focus on the most important things in life and help us to give one another the benefit of the loving doubt. To give one another, the benefit of the doubt and check it out. To say, "I wonder if they meant that" and then just say, "did you mean that. Really, did you mean that? Or was that just a flippant remark?" And then have a little conversation. Forgive one another, move on. How many times should we forgive one another? 99 times nine. Over and over, that means. Cause it's difficult, this journey of life. But so blessed when we allow the flow of Divine Mercy and the Mother of Mercy - that grace to flow into our relationships. That grace to flow into our Church.

And you know, Mary keeps pouring out the mercy. They say that across the world over 300 apparitions are happening at any given time. This one in Champion has been studied and approved and it's true. You don't have to believe it, but you may believe it. This when Our Lady appeared here in 1859. She loves you. She wants to bring you to Jesus. She appreciates the love of her spouse, Joseph, who also loves you. You know, he's called the Terror of Demons. So, if you have evil spirits chasing you or causing you all kinds of problems, pray to Saint Joseph. Saint Joseph, Terror of Demons, pray for us.

So, we don't use our baptismal graces often enough to keep out evil influence. You have grace coming from your baptism and your confirmation. Use those graces. Don't act helpless. Use the graces. If depression starts to come, "in the name of Jesus, by His Most Precious Blood, lift my spirits. You, spirit of depression, be gone. Joseph, Terror of Demons, come to my aid and to my assistance." You have all kinds of weapons in the Catholic Church. Use them. Use them to grow in holiness. Use them to defend your family. Use them to be light in the midst of darkness.

Now I hope you'll join me down in the Apparition Oratory to pray the Holy Rosary. It's a fitting prayer for all families to pray together often. And if you've forgotten, you might listen, carefully. But it's a wonderful family that's been praying the rosary a long time. And there's children and grandchildren there. It's a beautiful experience I'm sure we'll have. In light of our pilgrimage intention this year to help our family and all families to know and share God's love,

we have invited Joe Warden and his family to lead us into the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary. The Warden family, all 10 children, plus 25 grandchildren gather each month to pray as a family. Isn't that incredible. 10 children, 25 grandchildren gathered together as a family to pray.

Pope Francis means for families to be accompanied with love, respect, and guidance. Guidance through the flow of life. Don't let the fast pace of your life or even anxious babies distract you from coming together as a family in prayer. I know sometimes for young parents, it's tough because the kids take all your attention. Offer that up as a gift of love to God. That's the way God cares for you. Even today. This is where we find love, where we express respect and discover the guidance to overcome the challenges that face all of us. There's no better place to pray than in the loving gaze of our Blessed Mother. She gazes on you with love and with mercy. Don't let another day go by without walking into the mercy of the Mother of Jesus and the mercy of Jesus, Himself. So, let's go and join the Warden family in praying the Rosary. The name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless.