



**Most Reverend Robert W. Finn**  
**Bishop**  
**Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph**

**Homily for Feast of St. John Francis Regis**  
**on the occasion of the**  
**First Use of Liturgical Propers for the Saint**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Kansas City, Missouri**  
**June 16, 2010**

On June 16, a Mass marking the first use of Liturgical Propers for St. John Francis Regis was celebrated by Bishop Finn at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Following is Bishop Finn's homily from the Mass:

*"I am possessed with such a desire for the missions of the Kingdom of Canada, that I fear I would be ... neglecting my vocation if I concealed from you, Most Reverend Father, the feelings I have in this regard. Therefore I ... beg you with [all] the prayers of which I am capable to assent to [this] wish." (St. John Francis Regis, from the Office of Readings)*

Dear Bishop Boland,  
Dear Father Marcoullier, Provincial Superior of the Missouri Province  
Father Vowells, Rector of the Rockhurst Jesuit Community, and pastor-designate of St. Francis Xavier Parish, and all our Jesuit brothers,  
Dear Fr. Holder, Pastor of St. John Regis Parish  
Dear brother priests and deacons,  
Dear Religious, and lay Faithful of the Diocese  
Friends in Christ all,

The letters of the young priest, John Francis Regis, inspire us today as we see his persistent desire to carry the saving message of Jesus Christ to the new world. His example and intercessions were active here nearly 200 years ago, when Jesuit Father Hermann Aelen, received permission to name the log cabin church that first occupied this very site after St. John Francis. Since 1839, if not before, the saint's name and prayers have assisted and inspired a good work of evangelization in Western Missouri.

While the Cathedral of the Diocese of Kansas City would be given the title of the Immaculate Conception, Regis would be held as a valued spiritual friend and patron. His sponsorship continued after the 1956 joining of Kansas City and St. Joseph. Not long afterward, Bishop Cody erected the parish in southern Jackson County that still bears his name.

It is an honor for me to enter into the history of our commemoration of the zealous missionary. Nearly two years ago, two of our priests, Fr. Paul Turner and Msgr. Bill Caldwell, together with Fr. Dennis McManus, who had recently taught at Conception Seminary, requested my permission to undertake a project to construct a set of liturgical texts proper to our patron. It seems that though St. John had been long venerated in the Jesuit *Missale*, there remained no prayers unique to the June 16 feast. With my encouragement the three gifted priests researched the writings of and about our Saint, and crafted orations, antiphons, hagiography,

and a preface in Latin and English. Just about one year ago, we received the approval from the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, that these prayers could be used in the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. Throughout the Diocese today those prayers have been lifted to heaven. Now it is my turn to offer them for the first time on this spot, on which was built Kansas City's first St. Regis church.

We are honored by the participation of so many of our Jesuit brothers, whose ministry and apostolic work remains important to Catholicism in our diocese. Particularly I welcome the Very Reverend Douglas Marcoullier, Superior of the Jesuits of the Missouri Province. His presence and this feast give me an opportunity to express my sincere gratitude and esteem for the generations of the Jesuits' pastoral ministry and, of course, a strong legacy of Catholic education. Rockhurst University, reaching the completion of its first 100 years, is synonymous with Kansas City, Missouri, and contributes inestimably to our community, to the Midwest and beyond.

Father John Vowells, recently nominated by Fr. Marcoullier to serve as Pastor of St. Francis Xavier Parish, has ably led the Rockhurst Jesuit Community here. He serves as an active member of our Presbyteral Council, and I continue to count on him as a trusted advisor on my own College of Consultors. Fr. Marcoullier and Fr. Vowells, and all our Jesuit friends, thank you for your ministry and thank you for being with us on this joyous occasion.

St. John Francis was on fire with God's love. He was alive in love for God's people, particularly the poor, the sick, and those who had not yet received the Gospel. His asceticism and constant preaching took him all over France. He preached interior renewal, true conversion, and moral integrity. While he unsuccessfully besought his superiors for an assignment to the foreign missions he did not withdraw in any manner from his mission at home. Perhaps he is for us a model of the New Evangelization. His work was among the Catholic faithful of his own place, and he succeeded in re-awakening in them the grace of their baptism. Restrained from the mission "ad gentes," to the nations abroad, he never tired in his determination to enkindle the faith that might lie dormant and inactive in believers.

I was interested to read about an account of a miracle of Saint Regis whereby he multiplied a store of grain to feed the poor. It is very similar to one I read of another French saint, St. John Vianney, whose biography has become better known in the recent Year for Priests. In the account of the Abbe' Trochu, it is told of the Cure' of Ars:

"It was in the course of 1829 that the supply of corn, [necessary to feed the orphans of the Providence] ... stored in the attic of the presbytery, was reduced to a few handfuls of grain lying scattered about the floor. .. Sweeping together in one heap all the grains that littered the floor, ... [Vianney] hid in it a small relic of St. Francis Regis, the wonder worker of LaLouvesc. After asking the orphans to pray for their daily bread, he, too, set himself to pray. ... Presently Jeanne-Marie Chanay appeared on the scene. 'Go and gather what corn there may be in the attic,' he told her. ... She experienced the greatest difficulty in opening the door of the attic, and as soon as she forced it ajar, a stream of [grain] escaped through the narrow opening. She ran downstairs in all haste: 'You wanted to test my faith,' she exclaimed, 'your attic is full... It is overflowing.' (*Chapter 9*)

St. John Francis was a saint's saint! John Vianney knew of his powerful intercession. Our predecessors here in this spot likewise entrusted their fledgling log cabin church, and their

mission, to his care. Indeed, in the few grains of their efforts, they would see today a Church that has grown in depth and breadth: many generations of Catholics who have allowed the good seed of God's truth and love to take root and grow into something very important, living, and life-giving, in our community and beyond.

We also know, as did our patron, that the preaching of the Gospel has to be renewed again and again. We ask his favor on all our apostolic endeavors: that moral righteousness will be the ground of our decisions and the motivation for our daily work; that humility, prayer, and a thirst for holiness will make us docile to the Holy Spirit; that the Holy Spirit will grant us a renewed trust in God's providence and strengthen us for a zealous care for the vulnerable: the sick, the poor, the migrant, and the unborn.

Dear friends, You and I must be missionaries after the example of St. Regis. Some may go far away. Others will announce the Gospel here at home. Everywhere we must bring the truth of the love of Jesus Christ to those who long for their Savior. I am happy for this occasion to discover more completely a blessed heavenly friend for our Diocese. I am very thankful to Father Turner, Fr. McManus, and Msgr. Caldwell, for carrying out this meaningful project that gives a new fuller voice to our worship. Because of their good work, each year on this Feast Day, June 16, in your parishes and oratories, we will recall the life of the young Jesuit missionary who wanted to come to us. Do not doubt for a moment that he will join his prayers to ours at any day we seek his help.

Thank all of you for coming to the Cathedral to celebrate the life of St. John Francis Regis, our patron. May the intercessions of Mary the Immaculate Conception, St. Joseph, Guardian of the Redeemer, and St. John Francis Regis, help us all reach our full stature as witnesses to Jesus Christ. Amen.