

**Homily for the Installation of Father Christopher Comerford as  
Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish  
Quincy, Illinois**

**August 18, 2017**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good for us to be here today for this Mass and Rite of Installation of Father Christopher Comerford as pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish.

In our Gospel reading today, as we hear our Lord teach about the sacred nature of marriage, we can see that, not only were the Pharisees surprised by His words, but so were His disciples. Jesus' teaching regarding the indissolubility of marriage not only elevates marriage to a status that it lacked at the time, but also enhances the dignity of those who chose to enter into the marital covenant. Our Lord points to the truth of the Sacrament of Matrimony, namely, that those who are called to serve God in this sacrament do so through fulfilling their duties to their spouse, and therefore help each other in leading lives of true Christian discipleship on their journey to their eternal reward. The covenant of marriage is a sign to us of the covenant between Christ and His spouse, the Church.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time that our Lord presents His teaching regarding the indissolubility of marriage, He also goes on to affirm the dignity of those who are not called to the sacrament of marriage. As a matter of fact, at the end of the Gospel reading, our Lord points out that there are those who are not called to marriage because they were born in a way that prevents it or were made that way by others, but there are also those who give up their ability to enter into marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Both of the states in life addressed in the Gospel, that of marriage and that of a life of celibacy, are essential to the growth of the Church in the midst of the world today. Both are precious gifts from our Lord that lead us toward lives of true discipleship, for celibacy and virginity are not contrary to marriage, nor is marriage contrary to the celibate vocation. Rather, they work in tandem with each other to build up the kingdom of God on earth. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, let us always remember to pray for those who have committed their lives to each other in matrimony as well as for those who are called to offer their lives to the service of God through lives of celibacy and virginity, that our Lord may give us the grace to live out our particular vocations in a way that bears witness to Him on earth and ultimately leads us to spend all eternity with Him in Heaven.

Today at this Mass we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Blessed Sacrament Parish with the Installation of your new Pastor. I am very pleased that Father Comerford has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic community of faith here at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Quincy. I am deeply grateful to you, Father Comerford, for the way you have faithfully served the people of our diocese since your ordination, in particular for the past eight years as Pastor of Saint Elizabeth Parish in Granite City. At the same time, I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Monsignor Kuse, for his dedicated ministry as Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish for the past eleven years and as Dean.

Father Comerford will now serve you as pastor in this Third Millennium of Christianity, so I think it is fitting to call to mind a theme suggested by our late Holy Father, the Great Pope Saint John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter, *NOVO MILLENNIO INEUNTE*, "On entering the New Millennium," which I quote as follows (nos. 30-31): "First of all, I have no hesitation in saying that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness."

We grow in holiness by following Jesus as His disciples. Closely related to the notion of discipleship is the concept of stewardship. In the First Letter of St. Peter, he writes of stewardship in these words: “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”<sup>2</sup>

In the Fall of 2015, I published my second pastoral letter, entitled, *Ars Crescendi in Dei Gratia*, Latin for “The Art of Growing in God’s Grace.” In it, I wrote, “The art of growing in God’s grace is the key to growth in the Church. Building a culture of growth in the Church starts with inviting people to experience the love of Jesus Christ.”

Over the course of the years leading up to the publication of my pastoral letter, I gave much thought to how we could, as a diocese, begin a process of strategic planning for growth in the Church. The growth envisioned is far more than just a quantitative increase in the number of people or the amount of money available to our parishes and the diocese. It is also essential to ensure that we give significant attention to the quality of our growth as we seek to grow more deeply in holiness.

In my pastoral letter, I said that we must do four things to build a vibrant community of saints:

1. Invite people to join us in prayer, especially Sunday Mass (hospitality);
2. Study the Bible and learn more about Jesus and our Catholic faith (formation);
3. Provide the sacraments as signs of hope and paths of grace to heaven (prayer); and
4. Serve those in need by practicing charity and justice (service).

The verbs in these four action items correspond to the four pillars of stewardship and discipleship that we have begun talking about in our diocese: hospitality, formation, prayer and service. We can all communicate more broadly the message of invitation.

Through prayer, discernment, and consultation with others, it has become evident that the Lord is inviting us to embrace more fully our call to discipleship out of which necessarily follows a life of stewardship.<sup>3</sup>

Stewardship recognizes that everything we have comes from God. We are stewards whether we recognize it or not and whether we like it or not. Stewardship from God's perspective is that He has given us gifts to be used not just selfishly for ourselves, but to be shared with others. Becoming

a disciple means making an intentional decision to accept the Lord's call to follow Him and live the discipleship and stewardship way of life.

I am aware that such a plan for growth is ambitious, but it is one about which I am very optimistic, especially given what this diocese has to offer and the many ways in which various groups are already poised to contribute to that growth. A key group that is essential to this plan for growth is the priests of our diocese, especially our pastors. But they cannot do this alone. They need the help and cooperation of all parishioners. To be able to put into practice the mission of Jesus, we need to be part of a team supporting each other.

Our priests are at the very heart of our journey forward. As Catholics, we rely first and foremost on God's grace. This grace comes to us through the sacraments of the Church of which the priests are the ministers. In a special way, it is the priest who celebrates the Eucharist for us, feeding us with the Bread of Life, nourishing and strengthening us for this journey.

Without the Eucharist, this way of life will never succeed. Without priests, we will not have the Eucharist. Therefore, we need our priests for this journey. I am very grateful for the fidelity with which our priests serve the diocese. They are men committed to the building up of the Kingdom

and to the salvation of the souls of those in our diocese and beyond. Their example of tireless dedication is an inspiration to me and to all of us of how we are likewise called to serve the Lord as committed disciples of Jesus Christ. It is their joyful, humble example that is, I believe, one of the major factors contributing to the growth in the number of seminarians studying for the priesthood in our diocese. They too, are signs of hope and encouragement to us as we continue this journey.

I pray that all of you will work with Father Comerford in seeking to be intentional disciples of the Lord and good stewards of the gifts entrusted to us for the growth of the Church as we journey together toward our inheritance in the glory of Heaven.

Therefore, dear parishioners of Blessed Sacrament Parish, I urge you to strive for holiness, to work and pray with your new pastor. Support him, help him, pray for him, and most of all, love him as he loves you and as Christ calls us to love each other.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Ephesians* 5:25, 32.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 4:10.

<sup>3</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, 1992, p. 8; <http://www.usccb.org/upload/stewardship-disciples-response-10th-anniversary.pdf>.