

**Homily for the Installation of Father Thomas Hagstrom as  
Pastor of Saint John Paul II Parish  
Mount Olive, Illinois**

**Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
August 15, 2017**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
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 Thomas Hagstrom as pastor of Saint John Paul II Parish.

Just a few moments ago, we heard these words from the Gospel of Saint Luke: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” These first words of the *Magnificat* clearly reveal the nature of the relationship between our Blessed Mother, Mary, and our Lord. For we see just prior to this statement, that upon arriving at the home of her cousin, Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, Elizabeth greets Mary as “Blessed are you among women.” In this dialogue we see Mary instinctively point the attention she received from Elizabeth back to Lord, directing the glory and credit to God. Our Blessed Mother does not seek attention or celebrity status associated with her role as the Mother of God,

rather she exercises true humility through understanding her position as our Lord's servant in this most important station in life.

It is most fitting that the installation of your Pastor take place here at this parish dedicated to the patronage of Saint John Paul II on this solemnity that honors the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, being taken body and soul into heaven at the end of her life on earth, for our great Holy Father, the late Pope Saint John Paul II, had a truly profound love for our Blessed Mother. His motto *Totus Tuus*, which means, "I am all yours," was directed to Mary. His devotion to her was so deep that he dedicated his ministry as our Holy Father to Mary as his Mother who, just as is evident in the first words of the Magnificat, pointed Saint John Paul II toward an ever more intimate relationship with her Son.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, we too, like Pope Saint John Paul II, should ever more earnestly strive to follow the example of our Blessed Mother, the model disciple of her Son, our Lord. In order that we, too, might share the most sublime experience of spending all eternity with our Lord in heaven, we ought to seek, like our Blessed Mother, to live as true disciples of our Lord in this life.

Today at this Mass we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Saint John Paul II Parish with the Installation of your new Pastor. I am very pleased that Father Hagstrom has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic community of faith here at Saint John Paul II Parish in Mount Olive. I am deeply grateful to you, Father Hagstrom, for the way you have faithfully served the people of our diocese since your ordination, in particular for your ministry as pastor for many years, most recently at Saint Anthony of Padua Parish in Quincy since 2005. At the same time, I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Father Larry Anschutz, for his dedicated ministry as Pastor of here in Mount Olive since 1991, the past six years of which were under the title of Saint John Paul II Parish following the merger of Ascension and Holy Trinity Parishes.

Father Hagstrom 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>1</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

qualitative growth that will guarantee sustainability for generations that follow.

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>2</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 Hagstrom 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 Saint John Paul II 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.

---

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

<sup>2</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>.