

14TH Sunday of the Year - Cycle C
Installation of Father John Nolan as Pastor Of The
Cathedral Parish of the Immaculate Conception,
Springfield, Illinois
July 7, 2013

† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

Reverend Fathers, Deacon, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“Rejoice!” This is how our first reading starts out today: the Lord calls on the people to rejoice over the abundance of gifts bestowed on them.

Today at this Mass we rejoice upon the Installation of your new Pastor, and I am very pleased that Father John Nolan has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of this community of faith. As we heard in today’s Gospel, just as Jesus sent the seventy-two disciples on their way with instructions to proclaim the peace of Christ and announce that the Kingdom of God is at hand, so every parish priest is called to invite people “to rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

I myself was privileged to serve as the pastor of a parish from 2001 to 2003. My Mass of Installation was in February of 2001, near the start of the new millennium. Father Nolan will now serve you as pastor within the Third Millennium, so I think it is fitting to call to mind a theme suggested by our late Holy Father, the Great Pope Blessed 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*. . . . To ask catechumens: ‘Do you wish to receive Baptism?’ means at the same time to ask them: ‘Do you wish to become holy?’ It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (*Mt 5:48*)”.

Pope John Paul II used to send a letter every year to all the priests of the Church on the occasion of Holy Thursday. In 2001, he wrote this to his priests:

“At this time, I am thinking of the work you do every day, work that is often hidden and, without making headlines, causes the kingdom of God to advance in people’s minds and hearts. I want you to know of my admiration for this ministry, discreet, tenacious and creative, even if it is sometimes watered by those tears of the soul which only God sees and ‘stores in his bottle.’ Your ministry is all the more admirable when it is tested by the resistance of a widely secularized environment, which subjects priestly activity to the temptations of fatigue and discouragement. You well know that such daily commitment is precious in the eyes of God.

At the same time, I wish to echo the voice of Christ who continually calls us to deepen our relationship with him. 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock' (Rev. 3:20)."¹ Referring to his Apostolic Letter that I mentioned earlier, the Pope continued, "In *Novo Millennio Ineunte* I indicated the commitment to holiness as the first element of all wise pastoral 'planning.' It is the basic task of all believers, so how much more it must be for us!"²

For a diocesan priest, I believe the keys to holiness are found in the promises of celibacy, obedience and the daily praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, the promises we made when we were ordained. The *Program of Priestly Formation* (5th edition), approved by the Holy See for the training of priests in the United States, says that "celibacy cultivates the evangelical motivations for embracing this [priestly] commitment and way of life: the undivided love of the Lord, the spousal love for the Church, apostolic availability, and the witness to God's promises and kingdom." Obedience "must be characterized by the willingness to hear God who speaks through his Word and through His Church and to answer His call with generosity. It is also a surrender of one's own will for the sake of the larger mission. In this regard, [priests] must develop a growing and deepening solidarity with Church teaching so as to be able to present that teaching with

conviction—having appropriated it as true—and a solidarity with ecclesiastical leadership to strengthen and sustain Church unity.” Through the daily praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Breviary or Divine Office, priests “pray with the Church and for the Church. They unite themselves with the body of Christ in unceasing praise and petition.” This is a “lifelong ministry” to “pray on behalf of the whole Church. It also cultivates a mind and heart attuned to the whole Body of Christ, its needs, its sufferings, its graces, and its hopes” (n. 110).

If any one of these three pillars of priestly spirituality is neglected, the necessary support for priestly identity and mission is weakened. That is why it is also essential to strengthen these supports through regular spiritual direction with a wise and holy spiritual director and by participation in an annual retreat. This is not all that is needed for a priest’s holiness, but the other elements necessary for his holiness are also essential for lay people as well.

The practical steps on the path to holiness applicable to all the Christian faithful involve following a basic plan of life. Some of these steps require daily application, such as praying a Morning Offering at the beginning of the day, the Angelus at 12:00 and 6:00 o’clock, grace before

meals, an examination of conscience, an act of contrition and a prayer of thanksgiving at bedtime. Praying the Rosary, doing acts of penance, giving to charity and reading the Bible and other spiritual books should be done on a regular basis, if not daily. Everyone must participate in Mass and receive the Holy Eucharist at least once a week on Sunday to be nourished in the faith and strengthened in the bonds of communion with the Body of Christ, but many people attend Mass every day, especially during Lent, in order to obtain its bountiful graces and support for daily life. In my opinion, going to the Sacrament of Penance to confess and be absolved of our sins is something that we should do at least monthly to be reconciled with God and with His Church. I say “we” because I do not prescribe a spiritual remedy that I do not take myself, and even bishops must acknowledge their sinfulness and beg for God’s mercy.

The path to holiness does not stop with specifically religious and spiritual activities, but extends into our daily lives at home, at school and at work. While the “universal call to holiness” was highlighted at the Second Vatican Council, St. Francis de Sales wrote almost 400 years ago in his classic spiritual masterpiece, *The Introduction to the Devout Life*, that holiness is possible in all walks of life, under any circumstance and at all times.

Whatever the tasks we have to perform in the world we are all called to be saints. Holiness is not the prerogative of the monks, nuns and parish priests, but of all. Everyone is called to live a life of holiness. Every human being is called to enter into living, loving and vibrant relationship with God, each according to his or her status in life.

In his homily at the Chrism Mass this past March in St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis said, "Dear lay faithful, be close to your priests with affection and with your prayers, that they may always be shepherds according to God's heart. Dear priests, may God the Father renew in us the Spirit of holiness with whom we have been anointed. May he renew his Spirit in our hearts, that this anointing may spread to everyone, even to those 'outskirts' where our faithful people most look for it and most appreciate it. May our people sense that we are the Lord's disciples; may they feel that their names are written upon our priestly vestments and that we seek no other identity; and may they receive through our words and deeds the oil of gladness which Jesus, the Anointed One, came to bring us."³

Therefore, dear parishioners of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, 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.

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Letters to My Brother Priests: Complete Collection of Holy Thursday Letters (1979-2005)* (Woodridge, Illinois: Midwest Theological Forum, 2006), p. 289.

² Pope John Paul II, *Letters to My Brother Priests*, p. 292.

³ Pope Francis, *Chrism Mass Homily*, St. Peter's Basilica, Holy Thursday, March 28, 2013.