

**Curia Thanksgiving Mass
Catholic Pastoral Center
St. Viator Chapel**

November 19, 2014

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: most, if not all, of us have had the opportunity at some point to attend a formal dinner event. Although the occasion for these events may vary, each dinner is fairly similar in the presentation. Some of the common elements that you would find include appetizers, drinks, table decorations, multiple courses of food, waiters, and entertainment of some sort, typically music.

One element that has become popular in recent years is the inclusion of ice sculptures as a way of adding to the environment for the event. These sculptures vary in size and complexity, but they always seem to draw the attention of the guests who are fascinated by the beauty and intricacy of this unique form of art.

What is even more impressive is seeing an ice sculpture being created by the artist. The artist starts out with a solid block of ice. In his mind, he or she knows what they want to create and how they will go about

achieving that, but to the onlooker, the final product is a mystery. As the carving continues, the onlookers begin to see the sculpture slowly taking form into something recognizable. And while the spectators may be impressed as the work continues to take shape, it is not until the finishing touches are applied that one can stand back and fully appreciate the masterpiece that has been unfolding in front of them.

In these final weeks of the liturgical year, the Church has been giving us readings from the Book of Revelation. These readings offer us some insight into the masterpiece of what awaits us in the glory of Heaven. The language used to describe Heaven is very ornate, inviting us to consider how lovely it will be to behold. Yet, whatever words or images that we use to try to describe Heaven falls woefully short of the reality of what we will actually experience, for as St. Paul says: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

While we are here on earth, we are not totally deprived of the vision of the glory that awaits us. The Second Vatican Council states that "the Church, that is, the kingdom of Christ which is already present in mystery, grows visibly in the world through the power of God."¹ We already share

in some of this glory through our participation in the life of the Church which is the “the seed and the beginning of the kingdom.”² In a sense, we are like those spectators watching as the ice sculptor continues to work toward the completion of his work of art. Unlike the spectators, though, we do not stand idly by just watching the Lord do His work. Rather, we are invited to cooperate with Him in building up His Kingdom which will reach its remarkable completion in Heaven.

Our Gospel reading for today’s Mass highlights this fact that we have been called by God to be stewards of His many gifts for the building up of the Kingdom. The more we dedicate ourselves to practicing that stewardship, the more we will see the unfolding of the Kingdom that awaits us and which has already begun here on earth.

At this point in time in our diocese, I believe that we have been blessed to see with greater clarity how the Lord is making use of this local Church for His work. As you well know, the theme of strategic planning for growth in the Church has been an important focus for me over the past year as we look toward the future of our diocese. Along with that focus, there have been some other things that have happened in our diocese over

the past year that have been helpful in enhancing the details of what this vision of growth looks like.

The first of those is something that we just completed, our Diocesan Adult Enrichment Conference. The theme of the conference was “Growing Communities of Faith” and it was an opportunity for the diocese to emphasize the importance of learning and teaching the faith in order to ensure both quantitative and qualitative growth. A highlight of the conference was the keynote addresses by Sherry Weddell, author of the book *Forming Intentional Disciples*. As we all know, this theme of intentional discipleship has been one that has been embraced in a wonderful way here among the staff of our Catholic Pastoral Center.

One might say that it is a nice coincidence that these two related themes of growth and intentional discipleship have risen to the top of our attention over the past year, but we know different. These two movements are a sign of God’s providence unfolding for us here in our diocese, giving us a glimpse of the remarkable plan that the Lord has for this diocese in His overall plan of building up the Kingdom.

Another event from this past year that has helped to refine this vision has come as a result of the work of our Holy Father. We are all well aware

of his insightful writings on the New Evangelization through his document on the Joy of the Gospel. His words have helped the members of the entire Church to reflect on the role that each of us play in spreading the Gospel as missionary disciples, cooperating with the Lord's desire to share the Good News with all people. This valuable contribution of Pope Francis, however, is not the one that I am thinking of in regard to the Lord's plan for our diocese.

The action of the Holy Father that has impacted our diocese in a more direct way is his naming of our former Vicar General to be the Bishop of Wichita. We were all sad to see Bishop Kemme go, after having been such a faithful servant for this local Church. But I believe God's providence has been at work in this regard as well in a way that has been a blessing to our diocese. I do not think it to be any coincidence that Bishop Kemme was named to lead a diocese that has gained the reputation for being so successful in the area of stewardship. The theme of stewardship is one that fits perfectly with the themes of growth and intentional discipleship.

All three of these themes have come together, I believe, according to God's will for our diocese as we take the next step forward. They each give us some very specific direction on how the Lord is inviting us to cooperate

in His plan. The perfect timing of all of these events can only have been possible by God's desire to see us make a significant impact on the building up of His Kingdom in this part of the Church. While there are still many details to be developed, we are invited to look in awe and gratitude at the masterpiece that God is chiseling right before our eyes.

Out of that gratitude for the gifts that He has bestowed upon us, let us renew our commitment to be good stewards of those gifts as we eagerly and joyfully put them at the service of our parishes, schools, organizations, and people of our diocese so that they might also follow along that same path as intentional disciples. The more we allow ourselves to cooperate with Him, the more we will see the beauty of the Kingdom that awaits us in Heaven.

As we continue this Mass, we give thanks to God for what He has done, for what He is doing, and for what He will do for us, through us, and with us. May our reception of the Body and Blood of Jesus inflame our hearts to burn with the love that comes from His Sacred Heart so that we might give our whole lives to Him and His Church as He continues to mold us as His people, journeying in hope toward the Promised Land of the glory of Heaven.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 3.

² *Lumen Gentium*, 5.