

**Homily for Curial Employee Recognition Mass
April 22, 2015**

**Catholic Pastoral Center
St. Viator Chapel
Springfield**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here for our annual Curial Employee Recognition Mass during which we give thanks to God for the variety of gifts that each of you brings in service to the mission of this local Church. Your day-to-day efforts provide the helpful resources to assist the parishes, schools, and faithful of our diocese in their journey of discipleship with the Lord.

My ministry in diocesan administration began thirty years ago, in 1985, when Cardinal Bernardin asked me to be part-time Vice-Chancellor. He said I could continue to do my parish ministry and legal services for the poor with the Chicago Legal Clinic. Well, that didn't last long until part-time at the Chancery became full-time and then it was off to Rome to study canon law for three and a half years.

Upon completion of my doctoral studies, I returned to the Archdiocesan Curia and served as Cardinal Bernardin's Chancellor from

1992 until he died from cancer in 1996. I continued as Chancellor under Cardinal George until the end of my second term in 2000, after which I became pastor of a large parish on the northwest side of Chicago.

People asked me at the time how I liked parish work in comparison to the Chancery. My answer was that, although I enjoyed my work as Chancellor, I received more affirmation in my first two weeks as pastor than I received in eight years as Chancellor! It's not often that people tell the Chancellor or anyone else in the Diocesan Curia that you're doing a great job! So I know that you may feel under-appreciated at times and therefore I want you to know that I very much appreciate all that you do for the Church, for the diocese and for me personally.

On the day that then-Archbishop Francis George was introduced at the press conference announcing him as the new Archbishop of Chicago, I remember a reporter asking him how he would describe the difference between him and Cardinal Bernardin. The new Archbishop replied in what I would soon learn was his classic clear, concise and incisive style by saying, "Cardinal Bernardin was a southern gentleman for South Carolina. I am a Chicagoan!" He said no more and the news conference ended

because all the Chicago reporters had no more questions since they knew what that meant!

Over the next few years of working with Cardinal George, I would see many examples of what that meant in practice. Cardinal Bernardin was always very gentle and soft-spoken, but people sometimes mistook his diplomatic responses for agreement with their agenda. This sometimes led to misunderstandings when people thought he would approve or promote their cause that in fact he did not support.

In contrast, people always knew clearly where they stood with Cardinal George, as he would not hesitate to state his disagreement when confronted with a point of view with which he differed, although he always did so with charity and respect for the person with whom he disagreed. He did not suffer fools, but he did not wish to make fools suffer. His criticisms were aimed at concepts and ideas, not the people who spoke them.

With the death of Cardinal George, I have now lost the second of my two great Cardinal-mentors. Although very different personalities, both Cardinal Bernardin and Cardinal George taught me lessons that shaped me to be the person and the bishop that I am today.

From Cardinal Bernardin, I learned the value of consulting broadly and trying to reach a consensus if possible before reaching a final decision. He lived out his episcopal motto, "As those who serve," by providing an inspiring example of tireless service right up until his death.

From Cardinal George, I learned the importance of availability in responding generously to the endless requests for a bishop's time, presence and assistance. Members of the Curia would often be amazed at the many obscure commitments that appeared on his public calendar. When asked why he was appearing at a particular function that seemed to lack the prominence warranting the presence of the Cardinal Archbishop, he would simply say, "I'm going because they invited me."

Both of these distinguished prelates were named to the College of Cardinals by Pope St. John Paul II, and all three of them showed us how to endure suffering and how to die with grace and peace. As we lay Cardinal George to rest tomorrow, please pray in thanksgiving for the life of this great churchman and his contribution to the Catholic community here in Illinois. May he now enjoy the reward of eternal life in the peace of God's kingdom.

Throughout the Easter season, we hear a great deal from the Acts of the Apostles. These readings recount for us many of the important events of the early Church that took place in the years immediately following the Resurrection. These events provide much more than just a historical account of those early years of Christianity. They provide many of the important principles and teachings that are at the heart of the nature and mission of the Catholic Church. Those principles are just as applicable to the Church today as they were nearly two thousand years ago.

One of those important principles is what we today would call the human resources of the Church. We hear the many ways in which human beings worked together to respond to the daily challenges faced by the early Church. We hear about the “hiring practices” that they employed, such as choosing a successor to Judas and in choosing seven men to serve the church as the first deacons. We hear about “performance reviews,” such as when the Lord confronted Saul on the work he was doing and straightened him out in order to perform the work that was pleasing to the Lord. We also hear about “conflict resolution” when decisions need to be made, such as at the Council of Jerusalem when the Apostles met to resolve a dispute regarding circumcision.

The entire history of the Church considers the many ways in which people have been involved in the life and mission of the Church, sometimes for good, and sometimes not. At the heart of this is the fact that Christ has chosen to organize His Church in such a way that the human resources of that Church have an important role to play in building up the Kingdom of God. With the assistance of His grace and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, these human resources have accomplished some remarkable things to advance the Church and the world closer to her final goal of Heaven.

The same continues to be true today. Each and every member of the Body of Christ has an important role to play in the life of the Church. God has blessed each of us with a unique set of gifts that have a specific purpose for the life of the Church. When we use those gifts according to this intended use, we give glory to God and contribute in our own special way to the mission of the Church.

Even though we work directly for the Church in our roles here at the Catholic Pastoral Center, it is helpful for us to not lose sight of the reason that we are doing what we do. Of course, we know that our jobs provide us with the financial stability to support our families. But if that is all that

we see from our work, we are missing something important. Thus it is good for us to reflect from time to time on how our work is an important part of the mission of the Church. Even if we are answering a phone call, responding to an e-mail, or working on a budget, all of these things can be done in a spirit of offering ourselves in service to Christ and the Church that He has established.

When we talk about employee recognition, we sometime think about stories that we hear from business and other organizations which acknowledge outstanding work, such as earning a lot of money for the organization or implementing a successful program. Those individuals are typically rewarded with some sort of gift or monetary compensation for their efforts.

This is not necessarily bad, but it can lead one to think that personnel are valued in an organization only when they are successful. While success is not bad, it is not the only criterion for recognition. Many of us have likely heard the words of Mother Teresa of Calcutta who said: "God has not called me to be successful; He has called me to be faithful." In the end, this is what the Church expects of her human resources - fidelity to what the Lord has called them. This is the true measure of success.

Going back to the Acts of the Apostles, we see how this is played out in many ways. Take for example the martyrdom of St. Stephen, which we have been hearing about in our readings. To some, he may have been classified as a failure, having been defeated by his enemies, being put to a shameful death. The Church, however, recognizes him as a success, for he remained faithful to his vocation and was thus granted the reward of eternal life.

Many of the other early figures suffered the same fate. While some had success in the sense of winning many converts or other apostolic achievements, what they are most recognized for is their holiness and obedience to the Lord. They are recognized for being good disciples who practiced good stewardship with what had been entrusted to them.

This is how we are to approach our roles as well, being disciples who recognize that the Lord has given us many gifts that are meant to be shared with others. Regardless of whether our efforts are successful from a worldly standpoint is not as important as being found faithful as disciples of the Lord.

At our luncheon after Mass, we will recognize significant milestones of several very dedicated employees. While such recognition is important,

may we never lose sight of the ultimate recognition that we all seek, when someday we hope to be greeted by Our Lord with the words, “Well done, my good and faithful servant. . . . Come, share your master’s joy” (Matthew 25:23).

May God give us this grace. Amen.