

**Homily for the Installation of Father Brian C. Alford as Pastor of
St. Jude Parish, Rochester
July 9, 2016**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

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

It is good for us to be here tonight for this Mass and Rite of Installation of Father Brian Alford as Pastor of St. Jude Parish. The residents of this town may not know it, but I am a rather frequent visitor to Rochester. I usually arrive quite informally and inconspicuously, running from Springfield to Rochester and back on the Lost Bridge Trail. I appreciate being able to hydrate and refresh myself at the Rochester Comfort Station. It's nice to know that I could go just a little bit further and re-energize here at the St. Jude Comfort Station!

Writing this homily was rather challenging in some ways. For the past three years, Father Alford has served full-time as my Priest-Secretary, Master of Ceremonies and Director of our diocesan Office for Vocations. We have travelled together over thousands of miles. What that means, though, is that he has heard some of my homilies over and over again! It

would be no exaggeration to say that Father Alford often knows what I am going to say before I say it! So, Father Alford, I am trying to be creative and offer some fresh ideas, but if I do say something you have heard before, well, this homily is for your parishioners as much as it is for you!

Our Gospel passage today from Saint Luke is the familiar story of the Good Samaritan. What is important to note is the question that prompted Jesus to tell this parable. After correctly reciting the two great commandments to “love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself,” the scholar of the law asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Jesus responds with the story about a Jewish man who was mugged, stripped and left half-dead along the Jerusalem-Jericho road. A Jewish priest and a Levite come close to the helpless person, but for whatever reasons, they fail to stop and help him. They were Jews but certainly not neighborly. In good storytelling, the third possibility often offers the solution. Everyone would be listening attentively to find out who the third person might be. The expectation would be that still another Jew would

come along and help the half-dead victim. Instead, Jesus says that a Samaritan came along and supplied an abundance of aid and hospitality.

How could this be? Jews and Samaritans hated one another for years. They were enemies. Everyone listening to this story would be shocked and insulted. In the end, the scholar of the law could not even bring himself to say the word "Samaritan" when Jesus asked him, "Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" He simply answered, "The one who treated him with mercy."

The point here is that we are to treat even our enemies with love and mercy. In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, it is good for us to reflect on the meaning of mercy and how we are expected to live mercy in our lives.

The true character of mercy is what sets it apart from pity. The Jewish priest and Levite might have felt pity for the helpless man lying in the road. But the Samaritan linked compassion to action. This is the key.

Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia, in his article, "A Jubilee Year of Mercy," published in the journal *FIRST THINGS*, wrote that we must also see the connection between mercy and truth. He said:

Truth is essential to the sacrament of reconciliation. As sinners, we approach God seeking his mercy. In a truthful act of

contrition, an honest admission of our sins, we find consolation and peace. But the sacrament is not meant to confirm us in our sins, as if mechanically mentioning a list of mistakes and bad actions excuses us from *renouncing* them and changing the course of our lives. The Christian vocation is more demanding but also more beautiful than this. The sacrament of reconciliation, received and acted upon truthfully, is a steady path to transformation and holiness.¹

Leading his parishioners on the path to holiness is the primary task of a Pastor. Today at this Mass we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of St. Jude Parish with the Installation of your new Pastor. I am very pleased that Father Brian Alford has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic community of faith here at St. Jude Parish in Rochester. I am deeply grateful to you, Father Alford, for the way you have served me personally with such loyalty and devotion for the past three years and so faithfully in our diocese since your ordination for the past five years. In fact, Father Alford was the very first priest I ever ordained, so he will always have a special place in my heart. Please note, however, that I am not giving him to you outright! You might say that I am sharing Father Alford with you here at St. Jude Parish, since he will still have part-time

diocesan responsibilities with me and at the Catholic Pastoral Center. Father Alford is a very diligent and hard worker, so I am sure that he will balance these duties well. I have also assigned Father Manny Cuizon to your parish, so you should have plenty of priestly assistance here. At the same time, I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Father Dean Probst for his dedicated ministry as Pastor of St. Jude Parish for the past ten years, as well as for his conscientious service that he has provided and will continue to provide as a Judge in our Diocesan Tribunal and as my Liaison for Priests.

Father Alford 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" (1 Peter 4:10).

Last September, I published my second pastoral letter, called, *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 past couple of years leading up to the publication of my pastoral letter last Fall, I have given much thought to how it is that we can begin a process of strategic planning for growth in the Church here in our diocese. 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.²

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 Alford 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 St. Jude 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.

¹ Charles J. Chaput, "A Jubilee Year of Mercy," *FIRST THINGS*, December 2015, pp. 35-36.

² 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>.