

**Homily for the Installation of Father John Nolan as Pastor of  
St. Joseph the Worker Parish, Chatham  
July 2, 2016**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

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

At this time of year, people of our nation are enjoying this Independence Day weekend. Many of us are likely to be getting ready to go on a summer vacation. Some of us leave everything to the last minute, of course, resulting in a frantic dash, trying to remember where everything is: tickets, passports and so on. For others, the excitement of travel begins with the preparation, which perhaps on occasion becomes even more important than the trip itself. This, it seems, is not a new phenomenon. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the great Scottish writer Robert Louis Stevenson, of *Treasure Island* fame, penned the phrase, "to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive."

It is surprising, therefore, when we read in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke that Jesus not only sent out disciples in a state that we could describe as woefully unprepared, but that He expressly forbade them to make adequate preparation. In today's Gospel passage, unique to Luke,

Jesus appoints seventy-two others – disciples not numbered among the Twelve – and sends them out in pairs to places that He himself will visit. Among His instructions to them, Jesus lists a whole series of things the disciples are not to do. In a nutshell, they have to do absolutely nothing to prepare for their journey. In the context of modern-day travel, Jesus would be saying, “Don’t take any currency (or credit cards) with you; don’t take luggage, because you won’t be packing anything – oh, and don’t bother taking a change of shoes!” Likewise, they must not look around for the best accommodation; they are to settle wherever they are made welcome, and they are to eat what is set before them. Worst of all: they are not to stop on the way to talk to anyone!

The point is that this journey is not a vacation. Jesus’ instructions emphasize the urgency of the task for His ambassadors. Jesus has just begun His journey to Jerusalem. He has set His face resolutely to this task, because in Jerusalem He will meet His destiny: to suffer, die and rise again. Before He reaches there, the kingdom of God must be proclaimed as far and as insistently as possible. Disciples must not delay the start of the journey through preparation, and they must not worry about what to take.

They are embarking on God's work as Jesus' emissaries: God will provide them with everything they need.

All the Gospels mention the 12 apostles and their being commissioned by Jesus to continue His mission. However, only St. Luke, in the passage we have just heard, refers to the sending out of the 72. There must be a reason for this. Jesus says that the harvest is big and there are not enough people to do the necessary work. In the same manner, Luke wants to tell us that the mission of Jesus is not carried forward only by priests and religious, but it is the responsibility of every believer. Through Luke, we learn that the mission of Jesus is also accomplished by ordinary people doing ordinary things and being faithful to their responsibilities in the everyday lives.

Today at this Mass we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of St. Joseph the Worker Parish with the Installation of your new Pastor. Some might call this a sequel. Others might think they are watching a rerun! Be that as it may, I am very pleased that Father John Nolan has accepted the call to return as the local shepherd of the Catholic community of faith here at St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Chatham. I truly believe that

God had a reason for Father Dennis Kollross to come here to serve as your pastor until his untimely death. I also firmly believe that God had a reason for Father Nolan to have served these past three years, first as Pastor of the Cathedral Parish, and then as Pastor of Little Flower Parish in Springfield. I am deeply grateful to you, Father Nolan, for your flexibility, your cooperation, and your significant contributions to the pastoral care of the Cathedral Parish and Little Flower Parish.

Father Nolan now returns to 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 from others, it has become evident that the Lord is inviting us to more fully embrace our call to discipleship out of which necessarily follows a life of stewardship.<sup>1</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. Even

private property must be seen as simply holding legal title in trust for the benefit of others, not just for myself. 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 my familiarity with 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 Nolan 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. Joseph the Worker 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.

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<sup>1</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>.