

**Homily for the Installation of Father Sunder Ery as Pastor of the Parishes of
St. Michael the Archangel, Sigel; St. Mary of the Assumption, Neoga;
St. Mary Help of Christians, Green Creek; and Sacred Heart, Lillyville; at
St. Michael the Archangel Church, Sigel, Illinois**

September 27, 2016

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

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

It is good for us to be here today for this Mass and Rite of Installation of Father Sunder Ery as Pastor of the parishes of St. Michael the Archangel in Sigel, St. Mary of the Assumption in Neoga, St. Mary Help of Christians in Green Creek, and Sacred Heart in Lillyville.

Today the Church celebrates the Memorial of Saint Vincent de Paul, who died in the year 1660 in Paris. Saint Vincent de Paul was a priest who renewed the clergy and defended the poor and the abandoned. He founded the Congregation of the Mission, known as the Vincentians, who sponsor my *Alma Mater*, DePaul University College of Law, where I gained my practical experience of providing legal services for the poor working as a senior law student at the DePaul Legal Clinic. Saint Vincent de Paul is the patron saint of charities, of hospitals and prisoners, providing us with a splendid example of how to live out the corporal works of mercy, which

are to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, bury the dead, shelter the traveler, comfort the sick, and free the imprisoned.

On this feast day of Saint Vincent dePaul and 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.

Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia, in his article, “A Jubilee Year of Mercy” in the journal *FIRST THINGS*, wrote that we must 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 the parishes of St. Michael the Archangel, St. Mary of the Assumption, St. Mary Help of Christians, and Sacred Heart with the Installation of your new Pastor. I am very pleased that Father Sunder Ery accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic communities of faith here in Sigel, Neoga, Green Creek, Lillyville. Your parishes have been through some difficult times. All I can say is that your former Pastor, Father Bud DeGrand, remains in my prayers. Please keep him in yours.

Father Sunder Ery 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).

One year ago this month, 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 pray that all of you will work with Father Ery 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, 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>.