

**Homily for the Installation of Father Donald Wolford as Pastor of
Holy Angels Parish, Wood River
July 1, 2016**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

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

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: next year will mark the 500th anniversary of one of the more significant events in modern Church history. That event is commonly known as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, a movement sparked by Martin Luther who posted his 95 Theses against the Catholic Church on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

As Catholics, we tend not to look to this event as something worth celebrating, for it marked the beginning of a very difficult struggle of disunity in Christianity, one that continues to this day. However, attentive students of history would be quick to remind us that the Protestant Reformation was only one side of the story. In response to many of the objections raised by the reformers regarding our Catholic faith, a movement known as the Counter-Reformation took place in the Church.

This time of renewal in the Church covered many different aspects of Church life. One such area was in the area of religious art. Artists were encouraged to create art through which “the people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of the faith, which ought to be borne in mind and constantly reflected upon.”¹ In addition to depicting beauty, sacred art was to teach and inspire devotion. During this time, many scenes from the Scriptures were produced so as to draw the faithful into a more profound and personal encounter with the Word of God.

One such work of art is *The Calling of St. Matthew*, based on the Gospel passage that we just heard. This masterpiece by the artist Caravaggio depicts in a dramatic way that life-changing experience when the Lord issued that simple, yet powerful command to Matthew: “Follow me” (Matthew 9:9). Far more than just a visual representation of an historical event, the painting “serves as a lesson to the viewer to be willing to follow Christ’s call.”² Those who may have not had the access or ability to reflect on this Scripture passage were now able to do so in an engaging way, one which would prompt a personal reflection on how they

themselves would respond to this invitation to encounter the Word of God and follow Him in their lives.

This is just one example of how the Church was able to bounce back from the criticism of the reformers as she worked to invite people to a deeper experience of their Catholic faith. When viewed from this perspective, we can see how the claim that the Church was opposed to the reading of the Bible was false. The Church has always loved the Word of God, but has always been careful to ensure that the faithful are not deprived of an encounter with that Word which would not cause confusion or lead to error. This is the basis for the encouragement of the Church to artists to produce work that confirmed the articles of the faith and so ensure that the faithful *did* have the opportunity to encounter the Sacred Scriptures authentically.

In our modern day, the Church continues to encourage the faithful to have a regular encounter with the Word of God. Now that the Scriptures are much more accessible to the faithful, various forms of study and prayer with the Bible are more popular than ever. At the same time, however, one

cannot help but notice how our society continues to stray from the teachings so clearly and so beautifully expressed in the Word of God.

The words we hear in our first reading from the Prophet Amos can be applied to our present situation. Among the many forms of famine that exist in our world, one of the greatest hungers among people is not for food or water, but “for hearing the word of the LORD” (Amos 8:11). One is reminded of the timeless words of St. Augustine: “our hearts are restless till they find rest in you.”³ Being created by God, we all have a built-in hunger to encounter Him and to find our rest in Him, yet so many people in our world are unaware of the source of this hunger, and they go searching for things to satisfy themselves in various worldly things. When one thing fails to satisfy, they move on to the next, resulting in a vicious cycle which leads one deeper and deeper into dissatisfaction.

As Catholics, we are therefore encouraged to make the Scriptures a part of our daily lives through reading and prayerful reflection. This will help us to resist the many pressures from society to seek happiness apart from God. Among the various forms of encountering the Word of God is through family prayer with the Bible. In his document on the Word of the

Lord, Pope Benedict wrote of the importance of the Bible in the life of the family with the following words:

Part of authentic parenthood is to pass on and bear witness to the meaning of life in Christ: through their fidelity and the unity of family life, spouses are the first to proclaim God's word to their children. The ecclesial community must support and assist them in fostering family prayer, attentive hearing of the word of God, and knowledge of the Bible. To this end the Synod urged that every household have its Bible, to be kept in a worthy place and used for reading and prayer.⁴

I would encourage you as families to consider how you might make this activity of reading and learning about the Word of God an enjoyable experience. As I mentioned, there are more resources available than ever for learning about the Scriptures, many of which can be quite fun and engaging for families.

The benefits of committing to being more intentional about encountering the Word of God are numerous. It will serve to feed the deepest form of hunger in your family, namely the hunger for God. It will

also strengthen your relationships with one another as it will be an activity in which all of the family can participate. It will also prepare you for how to live your lives according to the teachings of Christ, teachings which promise true happiness and fulfillment, as opposed to the many things of the world which promise the same, but fail to deliver.

There is also a benefit to the larger community beyond your family. In the same document I referenced earlier, Pope Benedict makes this point with the following words:

We cannot keep to ourselves the words of eternal life given to us in our encounter with Jesus Christ: they are meant for everyone, for every man and woman. Everyone today, whether he or she knows it or not, needs this message. May the Lord himself, as in the time of the prophet Amos, raise up in our midst a new hunger and thirst for the word of God (cf. Am 8:11). It is our responsibility to pass on what, by God's grace, we ourselves have received.⁵

Today the Church celebrates the feast day of St. Junípero Serra for the first time following his canonization by Pope Francis last September in Washington, D.C. As we do so, we look to him as an example of one who

zealously shared the Good News of our Catholic faith with many here in our country. We ask his intercession that our parishes may be a place where we grow in our love for the Word of God and our Catholic faith. From that, we pray that we too might set out as missionary disciples who, through our words and actions, invite others to encounter the invitation of Christ, the Word of God, to follow Him and so discover the peace and joy that comes from living as members of His family here and forever in Heaven.

Today at this Mass we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Holy Angels Parish with the Installation of your new Pastor, and I am very pleased that Father Donald Wolford has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic community of faith here at Holy Angels Parish in Wood River. At the same time, I am deeply grateful to Father James Flach for his years of dedicated service as your Pastor.

Father Wolford 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 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.⁶

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.

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 called to likewise 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 your new pastor 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 Holy Angels 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 *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, ed. the Rev. H.J. Schroeder, OP (Rockford: TAN Books, 1978), 216.

² Peszek, Matthew, "Sacred Art as a Pedagogical Tool", *Adoremus* – Society for the Renewal of the Sacred Liturgy, St. Louis, MO, May 2009.

³ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book I, Chapter I.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, §85.

⁵ *Ibid*, §91.

⁶ 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>.