

**Homily for the Installation of Father Alan Hunter as
Pastor of Saint Lawrence Parish
Greenville, Illinois**

August 6, 2017

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

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 Allen Hunter as Pastor of Saint Lawrence Parish.

Indeed, it is always good for us to be here in close proximity to the Lord every time we come to church. "It is good for us to be here!" This was the joyful exclamation of Saint Peter as he witnessed the Transfiguration of the Lord, which we celebrate today. Our Gospel passage from Saint Matthew recounts this event as one of the pivotal experiences in the lives of Jesus' disciples. For a moment, Peter, James and John were given a glimpse of His divine nature, but Jesus instructed them not to say anything about what they had seen until He had been raised from the dead, since they would not fully understand this vision until after Jesus' resurrection. Indeed, years later after Our Lord's resurrection, this experience still

resonated so strongly with Saint Peter that he wrote about it in his letter that we heard in our second reading today.

Let us be caught up like Peter to behold the divine vision and to be transfigured by that glorious transfiguration. Let us retire from the world, stand aloof from the earth, rise above the body, detach ourselves from creatures and turn to the creator, to whom Peter in ecstasy exclaimed: *Lord, it is good for us to be here.*

It is indeed good to be here, as you have said, Peter. It is good to be with Jesus and to remain here for ever. What greater happiness or higher honor could we have than to be with God, to be made like him and to live in his light?

Therefore, since each of us possesses God in his heart and is being transformed into his divine image, we also should cry out with joy: *It is good for us to be here*—here where all things shine with divine radiance, where there is joy and gladness and exultation; where there is nothing in our hearts but peace, serenity and stillness; where God is seen.¹

Today at this Mass we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Saint Lawrence Parish with the Installation of your new Pastor. I am very pleased that Father Hunter has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic community of faith here at Saint Lawrence Parish in Greenville. I am deeply grateful to you, Father Hunter, for the way you have faithfully served the people of our diocese since your ordination, in particular for the past two years as Pastor of Saint Jerome, Saint Elizabeth and Saint James Parishes, as well as Canonical Administrator of Saint John Neumann School. At the same time, I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Father Paul Kala, for his dedicated ministry as Parochial Administrator of Saint Lawrence Parish for the past three years.

Father Hunter 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.”²

In the Fall of 2015, I published my second pastoral letter, entitled, *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 course of the years leading up to the publication of my pastoral letter, I gave much thought to how we could, as a diocese, begin a process of strategic planning for growth in the Church. 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.³

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 Hunter 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 Saint Lawrence 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 From a sermon on the transfiguration of the Lord by Anastasius of Sinai, bishop, Second Reading for the Office of Readings, *Liturgy of the Hours* for the Feast of the Transfiguration, August 6.

² 1 Peter 4:10.

³ 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>.