

**Homily for the Installation of Father Daniel Willenborg as
Pastor of Holy Family Parish, Litchfield, and Saint Agnes Parish, Hillsboro,
at Holy Family Parish, Litchfield, Illinois**

July 9, 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 Daniel Willenborg as Pastor of Holy Family Parish in Litchfield and Saint Agnes Parish in Hillsboro.

In our Gospel, today we hear Jesus tell those who had gathered to hear Him preach:

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”¹

In the day and age in which Jesus was preaching, this message would have made much more sense to his audience than it might immediately make to us today. If, however, we take a moment to consider what a yoke is and what our Lord was saying to His listeners, it certainly makes sense in our attempting to live as His disciples today as well.

Our Lord offers us a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light, but what exactly does this mean? On a technical level, a yoke is a device that was used by farmers to harness two animals together so that they might work in unison, rather than independently when ploughing the fields. On a more metaphorical level, the rabbis often referred to the interpretation of the Torah as a “yoke” which was neither easy nor light. What our Lord was saying is that when compared to the message taught by other rabbis, His was easy and if we connect ourselves to him under His yoke then He is there to lighten the burden of living as His disciples.

My dear brothers and sisters, I know that following the will of our Lord doesn't always feel like it is yoke that is easy or a burden that is light. At times, it may even feel like following the ways of the world would be easier than living for Christ and seeking to follow His will in our lives. But I can assure you that our Lord is there to help lighten the burden. You see, the thing that is easy for us forget is that a yoke takes two to maneuver it. We are never left on our own to shoulder the burden of cultivating a life of Christian discipleship; our Lord is always connected to us if we take these burdens to Him in prayer.

Today at this Mass we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Holy Family and Saint Agnes Parishes with the Installation of your new Pastor. I am very pleased that Father Willenborg has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic communities of faith here at Holy Family in Litchfield and at Saint Agnes in Hillsboro. I am deeply grateful to you, Father Willenborg, for the way you have faithfully served the people of our diocese since your ordination to the priesthood, in particular for the past eight years as pastor of Saint Louis Parish in Nokomis. At the same time, I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Father James Neuman, for his dedicated ministry as Pastor of Holy Family and Saint Agnes for the past sixteen years, as well as Dean of the Litchfield Deanery for the past seven years.

Father Willenborg 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 Willenborg 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 Family and Saint Agnes Parishes, 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 Matthew 11:28-30

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>.