

**Homily for the Installation of Father Daren Zehnle as  
Pastor of Saint Augustine Parish  
Ashland, Illinois**

**August 16, 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 Daren Zehnle as pastor of Saint Augustine Parish.

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of Saint Stephen of Hungary. Born in the year 977, Saint Stephen was born to a noble family that had converted from paganism to Christianity. Upon succeeding his father, Stephen made it his mission not only to root out paganism and idolatry in the land, but to establish a vibrant community of faith. As a matter of fact, Stephen placed his realms under the patronage of the Blessed Mother, to whom he had a great personal devotion and after whom he modeled his life.

It is most fitting that the Church provides us with a Gospel reading today that echoes the sort of life that was led by Saint Stephen. Just a few moments ago we heard in our Gospel the parable of the talents, in which

Our Lord tells of a man who, before embarking on a journey, summoned his servants and gave to each of them a certain amount of money to care for in his absence. Two of the servants went out and used what their master had given them wisely and in turn saw a return that doubled what they had been given. However, the third servant, fearful of the master, kept what he had been given to himself and returned only that same amount to the master. The two who used the gift wisely and saw a return on what they had been given are invited to share their master's joy, whereas the one who kept to himself what he had been given was cast out.

In relation to our Lord, Saint Stephen of Hungary clearly falls into the first group of servants from this parable. He was given much opportunity by his birth into a noble family, which he used as an opportunity to live as Christ's disciple and build up the kingdom of God here on earth. Given the example of Saint Stephen of Hungary and the parable we just heard, the question that we must ask ourselves is: Into which group do we fall? Do we fall into the first group that uses the gifts we have been given and always seeks to build up the kingdom of God by living as Christ's disciples on a daily basis? Or do we fall into the second group that takes the gifts the

Lord has given us and keeps them selfishly for ourselves and our own profit rather than being good stewards of what we have been given? As we promote the stewardship and discipleship way of life in the parishes of our diocese, I certainly hope that each of us can say that we fall into the first group and that we strive on a daily basis to live as Christ's disciples as good stewards of our gifts. If however, we find ourselves falling short in this matter, let us, like Saint Stephen of Hungary, seek to model our lives after that of our Blessed Mother, the model disciple of her Son.

Today at this Mass we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Saint Augustine Parish with the Installation of your new Pastor. I am very pleased that Father Zehnle has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic community of faith here at Saint Augustine Parish in Ashland. I am deeply grateful to you, Father Zehnle, for the way you have faithfully served the people of our diocese since your ordination, in particular for the past year as Parochial Vicar of Saint Agnes Parish as well as Associate Director of the Office of Divine Worship and the Catechumenate, Judge of the Diocesan Tribunal and my Chief Master of Ceremonies. At the same time, I also wish to express my deep appreciation

to Father Chuck Edwards for his dedicated ministry as Pastor of Saint Augustine Parish for the past two years and as he will now focus full-time on promoting discipleship and stewardship in the parishes of our diocese.

Father Zehnle 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."<sup>1</sup>

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 quality of our growth as we seek to grow more deeply in holiness.

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.<sup>2</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. 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 Zehnle 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 Augustine 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> 1 Peter 4:10.

<sup>2</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>.