

**Homily for the Installation of Father Charles Edwards as Pastor and
Welcome for Father Mark Tracy as Parochial Vicar of St. Anthony of Padua Parish,
Effingham, and Annunciation Parish, Shumway, at
St. Anthony of Padua Church, Effingham**

July 1, 2018

**† 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 Charles Edwards as Pastor and welcome for Father Mark Tracy as Parochial Vicar of St. Anthony of Padua Parish, Effingham, and Annunciation Parish, Shumway.

Today's Scripture readings teach us about God's wisdom and remind us that God offers life and healing in unexpected ways. In the Book of Wisdom, which we heard in the first reading, wisdom is not the conventional kind associated with intellectual pursuits. Wisdom in the biblical sense is living in right relationship with God. To reinforce this theme, the author of the Book of Wisdom, traditionally understood to be King Solomon, contrasts the advantages of service—which leads to wisdom—with the disadvantages of not serving God—which he describes as folly. Because we are made in God's image and likeness, we are called to be in a special relationship with God. Choosing to serve God places

everything in proper perspective. God gives us the gift of Holy Communion to sustain our relationship with Him and thereby enjoy eternal life in His presence.

In our Gospel, we heard of a little girl at the point of death and a woman with a chronic illness. Jesus restores both the young girl and the older woman to good health through their relationship with Him. After Jesus raises the young girl from the sleep of death, He tells her family to give her something to eat. Every time we gather at the altar to partake of the Eucharist, Jesus tells us, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (John 6:46). That is why it is so important for us to come to Mass every Sunday and receive this bread of life.

As we gather today for this Mass, we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of St. Anthony of Padua Parish and Annunciation Parish with the Installation of your new Pastor and the welcome of your newly-ordained parochial vicar. It was a great blessing for me to ordain Father Mark Tracy to the sacred priesthood just a little over a month ago. Let me tell you a little bit about him.

Mark Adam Tracy is the son of Jim and Jil Tracy. He is the third of four children and his home parish is Holy Family Parish in Mount Sterling. He attended Brown County High School in Mount Sterling and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he majored in recreation, sport, and tourism management – subjects that will certainly be handy as a parish priest! He studied for the priesthood at Saint Meinrad Seminary in southern Indiana. His hobbies are hanging out with friends, traveling, exercising, playing sports and watching Cardinals' baseball. That should make rectory life interesting with his new pastor! He certainly does like to exercise, having walked across the United States twice! As a newly ordained priest, he is most looking forward to building up the Church (the Body of Christ) through celebrating the sacraments with the People of God and journeying with them through the ups and downs of life.

At the same time, I am very pleased that Father Chuck Edwards has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic communities of faith here at St. Anthony of Padua Parish and Annunciation Parish.

Father Edwards and Father Tracy will now serve you as pastor and parochial vicar, respectively, 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

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 this regard, I am very grateful to Father Chuck Edwards for his pioneering efforts as the Director of Stewardship and Discipleship for our diocese for the past three years. I am pleased that he will continue as a consultant as we seek to implement our diocese's commitment to discipleship and stewardship.

Last year we held our Fourth Diocesan Synod, in which we focused on discipleship and stewardship. In addition to the clergy and consecrated religious who participated, delegates from each of our 129 parishes in this Diocese voted overwhelmingly to adopt a dozen declarations intended to set the direction and tone for the pastoral ministry of this local Church for at least the next ten years.

The first of these declarations proclaims a new mission statement for all of us as members of this Diocese: "The mission of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is to build a fervent community of intentional and dedicated missionary disciples of the Risen Lord and steadfast stewards of God's creation who seek to become saints. Accordingly, the community of Catholic faithful in this diocese is committed to the discipleship and stewardship way of life as

commanded by Christ Our Savior and as revealed by Sacred Scripture and Tradition.”

To further this mission, the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is committed to implementing the Four Pillars of Discipleship and Stewardship, namely, **hospitality, prayer, formation** and **service**. In other words, we will **invite** people proactively to join us in prayer, especially Sunday Mass; we will **provide** well-prepared celebrations of the sacraments and other occasions for **prayer** as signs of hope and paths of grace to heaven; we will **study** the Bible and **learn** more about Jesus and our Catholic faith; and we will **serve** each other, especially those in need, by practicing charity and justice.

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. 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 would not have the Eucharist. Therefore, we need our priests for this journey. They teach us how to serve the Lord as committed disciples of Jesus Christ. Please pray for them as they work for the salvation of souls and as we seek to build up the Kingdom of God in our diocese and beyond.

I pray that all of you will work with Father Edwards and Father Tracy 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 St. Anthony of Padua Parish and Annunciation Parish, I urge you to strive for holiness, to work and pray with your new priests. Support them, help them, pray for them, and most of all, love them as they love you and as Christ calls us to love each other.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ 1 Peter 4:10.

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>.