

**Homily for the Installation of Father Paul Bonk as
Pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish, Pierron, St. Nicholas Parish, Pocahontas,
and St. Gertrude Parish, Grantfork, at Immaculate Conception Church,
Pierron, Illinois**

June 17, 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 Father Paul Bonk as Pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish, Pierron, Saint Nicholas Parish, Pocahontas, and Saint Gertrude Parish, Grantfork.

It is significant that, when Jesus spoke of the great mystery of the kingdom of God, He turned to the everyday, taken-for-granted mysteries of growth and fruitfulness, as we hear in today's Gospel. So often, the stories Jesus tells are drawn from the world of planting, harvesting, shepherding, pruning. We can think of Him as someone who spent time watching and reflecting upon these patterns of day-to-day life. In His teaching we can see how Jesus recognizes, in these mundane realities, places of grace and signs of God's work. Men and women work the land, plant the seed, and reap the harvests, but the growing itself, the journey from the tiny seed to the great tree teeming with life, goes on without us.

God's loving power is secretly at work making our routine efforts abundant with life and goodness. This, Jesus tells us, is what God's kingdom is like.

Just like the prophets before him, Jesus urges his followers to trust not in their own efforts or plans, but in the mystery of God's powerful, ever-creative love for them. The sower still has to prepare the land, and sow the seed; but the real work of new life happens in God's secret ways, while the sower sleeps, and gets on with the rest of life.

In our lives, too, the Lord has sown his seed and is permanently at work within us; but, as Saint Paul explains, for the moment we do not see it, for we live by faith, not by sight. While we are called to cooperate, the work of salvation is God's achievement, not ours. In fact, God is longing for us to grow in faith, hope and love, in freedom and goodness, more than we do ourselves. That is why the Psalmist can speak of believers who have grown old still continuing to flourish, "still full of sap, still green." That is why Saint Paul can proclaim, "We are always full of confidence." That is why we can humbly look forward to the day when the Lord comes; for then he will reveal the harvest that has been achieved in us.

Today at this Mass we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Immaculate Conception Parish, Saint Nicholas Parish, and Saint Gertrude Parish with the Installation of your new Pastor. I am very pleased that Father Bonk has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic communities of faith here in Pierron, Pocahontas and Grantfork. At the same time, I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Father Scott Snider, for his dedicated ministry as Pastor for the past three years.

Father Bonk 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

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.

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 Bonk 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 Immaculate Conception, Saint Nicholas and Saint Gertrude 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 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>.