

**Homily for the Installation of Father Aaron Kuhn as Pastor of  
Holy Family Parish, Mt. Sterling, and St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, Camp Point**

**Tuesday of the 19<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time - Memorial of St. Clare  
Tuesday, August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**† 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 Aaron Kuhn as Pastor of Holy Family Parish, here in Mt. Sterling, and Thomas the Apostle Parish in Camp Point.

As we gather today for this Mass, we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of these parishes, and we are offered for our reflection the beautiful parable of the lost sheep. Perhaps we know the story *too* well, and we take it for granted, but our celebration today, entrusting these parishes to their new pastor, should open our eyes and hearts to a deeper reading of Christ's words.

Matthew tells us that this parable is given right after the disciples had come to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus answers by referencing a child, and the necessity of childlikeness to enter God's kingdom. Many different interpretations have been given to Christ's

words, but today perhaps we should just look again at the words that Jesus uses: “Whoever *humbles* himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus emphasizes to all of us the *humility* of a child. The virtue that marks the members of God’s kingdom is first that of humility. Why is this important? I think it is because we often think of everything *except humility* when we speak about what it means to be Christians, what it means to be disciples, and what it means to be saints. We talk about love, service, patience, kindness, courage, faith, and hope ... but how often do we put humility at the top of the list?

Humility, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us, is “the virtue by which a Christian acknowledges that God is the author of all that is good.” All that we have been given that is good: our lives, our faith, our families, our parish ... all those virtues and wonderful Christian qualities mentioned above ... are gifts from God! My brothers and sisters in Christ, today He invites us to recognize them as gifts. I offer this reflection both to all of you, and in particular to your new pastor.

Fr. Aaron Kuhn was ordained in 2018, and has spent the last two years as a parochial vicar at St. Peter’s in Quincy. Before he entered the seminary, he worked in the Finance Office of our Diocesan Curia at the Catholic Pastoral

Center in Springfield, where I first got to know him. I am sure that this experience will be very helpful to Father Kuhn now in his pastoral ministry.

Today, as I entrust the pastorates of Holy Family and St. Thomas the Apostle to him, I remind him to remain *humble* before the Lord, Who is the true shepherd, and caretaker of *all of you*, and the one who gives all the gifts we need to stay close to Him. Aaron, above all, know that you are an *Alter Christus*, another Christ, shepherding your parish in the name of God, and in collaboration with me, your bishop, both of us as servants of the Lord. With these particular readings in mind, I beg you as you begin this pastorate to humbly rely on Him for everything.

I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Father Stephen Thompson for his dedicated ministry as your Pastor for the past 8 years. Our prayers and thanks go with him as he becomes Pastor at St. Mary and St. Mark in Madison.

Father Kuhn will serve you as pastor as we continue forward into 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> The prophet Micah put different words on this same truth: holiness is "to do justice ... love kindness ... and walk humbly with your God".

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."

In 2017 we concluded 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 the next several 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

Thanks to the leadership of Father Thompson, your parishes have already begun to take steps to implement the goals of our Diocesan Synod. 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.

I pray that all of you will work with Father Aaron Kuhn 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 St. Thomas the Apostle parishes, I urge you to strive for holiness, to work and pray with your new priest. 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>.