

**Homily for the Installation of Father Brian Alford as
Rector of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

July 19, 2018

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Recently, some colleagues and I were discussing the question proposed by some theologians that we can hope that “all will be saved.” According to this theory, it is reasonable to hope that all people will be saved and that no one – other than the Devil and the fallen angels – has ever or will ever go to hell. In other words, since we cannot know for certain who may be in hell, we can hope that no one is in hell and that hell, in fact, is empty.¹

The problem with this theory is that it is contrary to what we just heard in today’s Gospel from Saint Matthew. In explaining the parable of the weeds and the wheat, Jesus says, “Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace,

where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear” (Matthew 13:40-43). Notice that Jesus does not say rather vaguely that evildoers might go to hell, nor does He seem to be issuing an idle threat, but He says rather clearly that His angels “will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.”

Rather than expressing the virtue of hope, it seems more like wishful thinking or simple naiveté even to pray that “all will be saved.” After all, if Satan and his minions allowed their pride to turn themselves away from God, what makes anyone think that at least some human beings will not engage their freedom to turn away from God as well? Yes, we pray that our Blessed Mother will “lead all souls to heaven” and Jesus says in the Gospel of Saint John that He will “draw all people” to himself (Jn. 12:32), but people are neither led nor drawn to the Lord against their will.

Thus, we cannot passively assume that we need not do anything in terms of seeking holiness because God will save us anyway despite ourselves. This is known as the sin of presumption. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “There are two kinds of presumption. Either man presumes upon his own capacities, (hoping to be able to save himself

without help from on high), or he presumes upon God's almighty power or his mercy (hoping to obtain his forgiveness without conversion and glory without merit)."²

For this reason, Jesus tells His disciples, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few " (Matt. 7:13-14). Jesus also says that He is both the Good Shepherd and the gate for the sheep (Jn. 10:7-14).

That is why Jesus founded the Catholic Church, instituted the sacraments, and gave us priests to act as shepherds on His behalf in leading the flock to salvation. Indeed, the word *pastor* comes from the Latin word for *shepherd*.

So it is fitting that today at this Mass we celebrate the Installation of Father Brian Alford as the new Rector of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. We use the term "Rector" of the Cathedral because, as Diocesan Bishop, I am the Pastor of the entire diocese and particularly of the Cathedral, which is the mother church of the diocese. In all other respects, Father Alford has the pastoral responsibilities and the canonical

authority of the pastor of the Cathedral Parish. I am very pleased that Father Alford has accepted the call to assist me in serving as the local shepherd of the Catholic community of faith here at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in our Capital City of Springfield. At the same time, I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Father Chris House for his dedicated ministry as Rector of the Cathedral for the past six years. Our prayers go with him in his new pastorate at Christ the King Parish in Springfield and I am grateful that he will continue to assist me as the Vicar Judicial, working in our Tribunal in the Diocesan Curia.

Father Brian Alford was ordained to the priesthood on May 28, 2011, here in our Cathedral. In fact, he is the very first priest I ever ordained to the priesthood! His first assignment was as Parochial Vicar at the parishes in Effingham and Shumway and as Chaplain at St. Anthony High School in Effingham. Father Alford is familiar to us here at the Cathedral, having lived here in residence at the Cathedral Rectory from 2013 to 2016 when he served as my Priest-Secretary, Master of Ceremonies, and Vocation Director. Since 2016, he has served as Pastor of St. Jude Parish in Rochester and as Vicar for Priests and Director of the Department for Vocational Services. In addition to serving here as Rector, Father Alford will also

continue to assist me in the Diocesan Curia as Vicar for Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations.

Father Alford knows, but I think it is always worth recalling as we serve as pastors in this Third Millennium of Christianity, that 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 Peter 4:10).

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 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 the years ahead.

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.³

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 House, we have already begun to take steps to implement the goals of our Diocesan Synod here at the Cathedral Parish. 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 Alford 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 the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, I urge you to strive for holiness, to work and pray with your new Rector. 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 <https://www.wordonfire.org/hope/>

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2029.

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>.