

**Homily for the Installation of Father Christopher House as Pastor of
Christ the King Parish, Springfield**

**Anticipatory Mass for the 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time
Saturday, August 22, 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 Christopher House as Pastor of Christ the King Parish here in Springfield.

As we gather this evening for this Mass, we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of this parish, and we are given several profound passages of scripture for our meditation and edification today, and for the years to come. Isaiah's words remind us that all authority comes from God. It has been my practice to install pastors in their parishes precisely to emphasize this point. I did not just show up here in the Diocese of Springfield one day and claim the title of bishop for myself. No, I was sent, I was commissioned, by then Pope Benedict XVI, who himself only carries that authority because of Christ's having first given that authority to Peter: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."¹

In a similar way, a priest is *sent* and *entrusted* with the pastoral responsibilities of a parish by his bishop, and it is during the rite of installation that we celebrate here this evening that this handing over of the “keys of the kingdom” (albeit only a small part of Christ’s Kingdom) takes place.

For all of us here today, Christ’s giving over His own authority to Peter challenges all of us to renew in our own lives our obedience to Christ. First of all, this means obedience and respect for the Pope, who is the Vicar of Christ in the Universal Church throughout the world, and your Bishop, who is the Vicar of Christ in the diocese.² That is why we pray for the Pope and the Diocesan Bishop by name in every Mass. We should also pray for all those who work in the Church and are united to our Holy Father. I ask humbly for your prayers, for myself, and for your new pastor, that both of us may remain faithful to the responsibilities that have been given to us.

A second part of this obedience, though, sinks even more deeply into our lives: Jesus’ gift of authority to Peter only comes after his profession of faith in Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” All of us here should ask ourselves if we could make the same profession, with *everything* that it entails. To be the “Christ” and “Son of the Living God,” can only mean that Jesus has to be “in charge” of every aspect of our lives.

Today all of us, with your new pastor, will recite the Creed, professing individually and together our common faith in Christ. I ask your new pastor therefore to take on the responsibilities of this parish with the heart of Christ, but I ask all of us here today to do the same in whatever responsibilities Christ has entrusted to our care. May we all carry them according to the truths that Christ teaches! May our hearts be opened ever more to give our full surrender to Christ in all the facets of our life.

With that prayer on our hearts, we also thank the Lord that today he gives all of you a new pastor! Fr. Chris House was ordained in 2002, and was a parochial vicar here at Christ the King for his first year of priesthood, followed by his being a parochial vicar at Ss. Peter and Paul Parish in Collinsville until 2005, for part of that time also offering the sacraments to St. Mary's in Edwardsville. He has been Pastor at St. Bernard's in Wood River (2005), St. Kevin's in East Alton (2005), and Holy Angels Parish in Wood River (2005-2007), after which in 2007 he was Parochial Administrator at our Cathedral in Springfield and Priest-Moderator at St. Katharine Drexel in Springfield. Beginning in 2004, he served as Specialization Director for the Office for Ministry Formation (which included liturgical ministry, liturgical leadership, and parish life ministry. From 2008-2013, he was the Director of the

Office for Vocations. He also served as Associate Director for Spiritual Formation for the Office of the Diaconate (2006-2014), and Section Prior for the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem (2011-present). From 2011-2013, he was Pastor at Holy Cross Parish in Auburn, Sacred Heart Parish in Virden, and St. Patrick Parish in Girard. For one year he was on faculty as Associate Dean of Formation at Mundelein Seminary, and since 2014 he has been the Pastor and Rector at our Cathedral in Springfield, while assisting me as Director of the Department for Canonical Services and Pastoral Services, the Office for the Diaconate, as Chancellor of the Diocese, as a Judge in our Diocesan Tribunal, and as Vicar Judicial.

Obviously, your new pastor has much experience, but I take this opportunity to offer him anew Christ's own trust and confidence, and that constant reminder to continue to place his trust back in Christ's hands.

I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Father Joe Ring for his dedicated ministry as your Pastor for the past eight years. Our prayers and thanks go with him as he begins pastoring Our Saviour's in Jacksonville. We certainly pray for him and his family, as they mourn the loss of his mother.

Father House 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."³ 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.

Jesus asks each of us the same question He asked His disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” May we answer as Peter did: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” The Lord is inviting us to embrace more fully our call to discipleship out of which necessarily follows a life of stewardship.⁴

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 Ring, 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 Chris House 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 Christ the King 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.

¹ Matthew 16:19.

² "Bishops, as vicars and ambassadors of Christ, govern the particular churches entrusted to them . . ." Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, n. 27.

³ 1 Peter 4:10.

⁴ 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>.