

**Homily for the Installation of Father Jeff Holtman as Pastor of  
Ss. Peter and Paul Parish, Alton, Illinois**

**Sunday of the 18<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time, Year A - August 2, 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 Jeff Holtman as Pastor of Saints Peter and Paul Parish here in Alton.

Father Jeff Holtman was ordained in 1985 and served as a Parochial Vicar at St. Thomas Parish in Decatur until 1988, then at Our Savior's in Jacksonville until 1994, and then at St. Anthony of Padua in Effingham until 1996. He was named Parochial Administrator of St. Mary's in Brussels, St. Joseph in Meppen, and St. Barbara in Batchtown for 1996 before becoming Pastor of St. Michael the Archangel in Sigel and St. Mary in Neoga from 1996-1999. He was then pastor of Mother of Perpetual Help Parish in Maryville for 5 years before discerning with the Franciscan Province of the Sacred Heart from 2005-2010. Since his return to the diocese, he was pastor of Holy Family Parish in Granite City as well as St. Mary and St. Mark Parish in Madison up until this summer. Your new pastor, as you can see, has had a tremendous amount of pastoral

experience all across our diocese, and I know he will be a good and faithful steward of you all here at our diocese's proto-cathedral.

I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Father Jason Stone for his dedicated ministry as your Pastor for the past three years. Our prayers go with him in his new assignment as Pastor of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Parish in Mt. Zion and St. Isidore Parish in Bethany.

As we gather today for this Mass, we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the parish of Saints Peter and Paul. Our Gospel today places before us one of the most famous stories of all Jesus' ministry, yet I think that this particular celebration of the installation of your new pastor offers us an opportunity to receive the story of this beloved miracle anew.

In particular, I offer for our reflection today Jesus' words: "There is no need for them to go away; give them some food yourselves." Two truths immediately leap from the page: 1) Jesus *notices* his followers' hunger, and 2) He *challenges* His apostles to feed the crowds, even, as it seems, they do not apparently have anywhere near enough food to do so. Two truths are evident: First, Jesus *cares* about his followers deeply. He knows our needs, our hungers, our fears, our emptiness, our tiredness, and our brokenness. Second, He *loves* us all the same and, more than that, He provides for us in our need.

I think we all know those two truths, but do we *act* according to that knowledge; do we live according to those beliefs? First, do we leave our hunger at the door of the Church – not letting Jesus know of our needs, not turning to Him when we are hurting or struggling, not trusting Him when we find ourselves empty? Secondly, do we turn to those that Christ has entrusted us to – our pastor, our parish family? – with those cares and questions, trusting that they really do act in the person of Christ? Do we have the humility to let God’s miracles happen through them?

I offer this same reflection to your new pastor. It is a great joy for me that Father Jeff Holtman has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic community of faith here. Today in a particular way he is entrusted with the pastoral care of all of you as an *Alter Christus*, another Christ, shepherding your souls in the name of God, and in collaboration with me, your bishop, both of us as servants of the Lord. His role as pastor is above all to lead this parish closer to Christ, to assist Christ in His work of sowing the seed and raising children of the Kingdom. With these particular readings in mind, I urge him as he begins this new pastorate to *trust* in Christ, too entrust all that he does here to Jesus, who can then work His miracles through his prayers and efforts here at Saints Peter and Paul.

Father Jeff Holtman 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 Stone, your parish has 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 Holtman 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 Saints Peter and Paul 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.

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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>.