

**Homily for the Installation of Father Rob Johnson as Pastor of  
Mother of Perpetual Help Parish, Maryville, Illinois**

**Memorial of St. John Vianney - August 4, 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 Rob Johnson as Pastor of Mother of Perpetual Help Parish here in Maryville. It is fitting that we pray for your new pastor today at this Mass, in which we celebrate the Memorial of Saint John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests, who worked so diligently to lead his parishioners to God.

As we gather today for this Mass, we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the parish of Mother of Perpetual Help. We are offered for our reflection this famous scene of Jesus walking across the sea at night to His apostles, Peter's attempt to meet Him, and then the tremendous movement of God's grace as all in the boat actually come to great faith, saying "truly, you are the Son of God." We know the story well, and perhaps we have already meditated many times on our own place in it. When has Jesus approached us in our own darkness, or the storms that beset our lives? When have we lacked faith in walking towards Christ, or perhaps when have we been moved to faith

in our experiencing of His care? Today, though, as we celebrate this installation of your new pastor, I think we are offered new insight into this familiar passage.

Matthew tells us that as Jesus catches Peter, He chides him “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” But I think this small remonstrance of Peter is actually one of great hope to all of us. We too, in our own lives, constantly face the reality that our faith is weak. We sometimes fear letting Christ into particular places in our hearts because we do not know what He will ask of us. We get distracted by the wind and waves that beset us in the daily work and pressure of our own lives. We look around and perhaps feel like we, our society, or our world is sinking beneath the waves. Yet we need not have the faith to conquer all those obstacles at once, only enough to call out “Lord, save me!” If we say that prayer from our hearts at every moment of fear or doubt, we need not worry about the sufficiency of our faith, for Christ will make up for our lack in His abundant love.

I offer the same reflection to your new pastor. I ordained Father Rob Johnson in 2018, and since then he has acted as parochial vicar at St. Boniface Parish in Edwardsville as well as Chaplain at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville and Associate Director in our Office for Vocations for this region

of our diocese. It is a great joy for me that Father Rob Johnson has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic community of faith here. My son, Rob, perhaps today you feel the pressure of your new pastorate and wonder if you have everything you will need to shepherd your flock well. May Our Lord's words today remind you that He is the true shepherd, and that today in a particular way *Christ* has entrusted you with the pastoral care of this parish, and you need fear nothing as long as you stay close to Him.

Father Rob will be for all of you 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, to entrust all that he does here to Jesus, who can then work His miracles through his prayers and efforts here at Mother of Perpetual Help Parish.

I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Father Joseph Havrilka for his dedicated ministry as your Pastor for the past 7 years. Our prayers go with him in his new assignment as Pastor of the parishes of St. Clare in Altamont, St. Anne's in Edgewood, and St. Mary's in St. Elmo.

Father Rob Johnson 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 Havrilka, 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 Johnson 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 Mother of Perpetual Help 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>.