

**Homily for the Installation of Father Christopher Uhl, OMV  
Pastor of St. Mary's Parish, Alton**

**Mass for the 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C  
July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022 AD**

**† 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 Uhl, OMV, as Pastor here at St. Mary's Church in Alton.

The Rite of Installation that we celebrate today is not a pre-requisite for a priest to begin functioning as the pastor of a parish, but every year when new pastors are appointed around our diocese, I try to go and do this rite with them because it reminds all of us of an essential part of being a disciple: Disciples do not choose their own path, they follow Christ where He leads them. 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, himself having been given his authority as Pope after Christ gave it to St. Peter when He founded the Church: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."<sup>1</sup> 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 morning that this handing over of the “keys of the kingdom” (albeit only a small part of Christ’s Kingdom) takes place.

At the same time, Jesus’ gift of responsibility and authority over His Church to Peter, and my giving a part of that to your new pastor today, is not something that happens only to the Pope, or to priests. *Every one of us* has been entrusted with a small part of Jesus’ Kingdom. For some of you, that is upholding Christ’s reign in your family, as you work, or among the people you are friends with. For all of us, Christ has given us the responsibility, and dignity, of caring for and protecting His Kingdom *in our own hearts*.

One of the ways that we do this happens every Sunday when we profess our faith by praying the Creed. For St. Peter himself, it was only after his profession of faith in Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” that he was made leader of the Church. Today, in a special way, all of us, with your new pastor, will recite the Creed, professing individually and together our common faith in Christ. By that profession, I officially ask your pastor to take on the responsibilities of this parish with the heart of Christ. But every time we profess the creed, every time we *pray* those words that billions of Christians have prayed down through the centuries, we each renew our own commitment

to Jesus! Does He reign over our hearts? Is He the Lord of our *time*? Of our *bank accounts*? Of those He has entrusted to our care? I have heard this question asked rather provocatively: if I were taken before a court and charged with being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict me? If Jesus is truly “Christ” and “Son of the Living God,” as we confess, then He *must be the only king of our lives*.

Of course, our prayer together this morning is not just a recommitment to the Lord, it is also to give thanksgiving and worship to God, Who daily provides for us. Today we offer thanks and gratitude to God for Fr. Paul Nguyen for his time as parochial administrator here, and the continued priestly service that Fr. Benjamin Unachukwu and Fr. Paul Kallal give to the parish. I want to personally express my deep appreciation to Fr. Jeremy Paulin for his many years as pastor here, and to Fr. Paul especially for his work here this past year. Of course, I want to also thank Fr. Chris[topher] Uhl for his own fidelity to the Lord in taking on this new assignment as your pastor. He was ordained in 2003, and was most recently pastor at Holy Ghost Parish in Denver.

Father Chris Uhl 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.*”

Holiness is nothing more than following Jesus as His disciples, as people who listen and learn from Him, who put Him first in our lives. In a real relationship with Christ, we discover that everything we have was first a gift from our Heavenly Father. St. Peter wrote of this realization and consequent conversation 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>2</sup> This is why *stewardship* naturally flows from the authentic *disciple*. We cannot help but make return to the Lord of all the good things He has done for us.

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.” All of us are called not just to receive God’s love for ourselves, but to become instruments of that love in those around us! This is how the Church will grow. That is how *this* Church will grow.

In 2017 we concluded our Fourth Diocesan Synod in which the clergy, consecrated religious, and delegates from all 129 parishes in this Diocese voted overwhelmingly to adopt a dozen declarations on how we should live out our identity as disciples and stewards in this diocese for the coming years. The first of these declarations was a bold response to God's call: "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."

Four pillars, essential areas for our faithful discipleship and stewardship, came from those synodal discussions: **hospitality, prayer, formation, and service**. In other words, we are the kind of Catholic Christians who 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.

Notice that all of these pillars come back to simply prioritizing our own relationship with God, and inviting others to join us in it. Abraham did this when he invited those three travelers to stay for a meal, and it ended up being an encounter with God Himself, Who gives Abraham and Sarah their long-desired son. St. Paul did this by suffering, by being rejected and persecuted, but that was how, at that particular time, he was a faithful steward of God's Word as the Lord had asked of him. Martha seems to have had stewardship down, and Mary discipleship; how beautiful to realize that Jesus comes to both of them, and they begin to learn from each other what it means to both listen, and love.

Your parishes have already begun following Christ as disciples and stewards, but He comes again to us today, to invite us deeper into that following after Him. Our Lord asks your new pastor for trust, for courage, for prayer in continuing His mission in these parishes. But he cannot do this alone; he needs the commitment and cooperation of all of you. Today it is my joy to join you all in this encounter with Christ. I pray that all of you will work with Father Chris[topher] Uhl 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 St. Mary's, 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> Matthew 16:19.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 4:10.