

**Homily for the Installation of Fr. Michael Haag as Pastor
Ss. Peter and Paul Parish, Collinsville**

Mass for the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C | July 24th, 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 Michael Haag as pastor of Saints Peter and Paul Parish here in Collinsville.

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.”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 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 as entrusted 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*, and that must be evident in the way we live!

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. John Beveridge and all the many years of his service here. I want to personally express my deep appreciation to him for his priestly care of these parishes since 1999. I also want to thank Fr. Michael Haag for his own fidelity to the Lord, and obedience to me, in taking on this new assignment as your pastor. Fr. Haag was ordained on May 28th, 2005, and after three years as a parochial vicar at our Cathedral as well as offering the sacraments at St. Katharine Drexel Parish in Springfield, he was named pastor of the parishes of Christ the King in Greenup, St. Charles Borromeo in Casey, and St. Mary in Marshall. In 2015 he became pastor of the parishes of Ss. Mary and Joseph in Carlinville, Ss. Simon and Jude in Gillespie, and St. Joseph in Benld, as well as being chaplain at Blackburn College and a member of our Diocesan Finance Council. This past

year, beyond those other responsibilities, he was also Parochial Administrator of St. Louis Parish in Nokomis, so you are receiving an experienced pastor!

Father Haag 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."² 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 not just called 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 discussion: **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. Christians must not succumb to a life of sin, but we also do not abandon the world to the rule of Satan. Like Abraham, we beseech the Lord for His mercy upon us and upon the whole world, and like Lot, we prioritize God's will above our own, showing to our neighbors the joy and virtue and freedom that sons and daughters of God are given. Our identity is firmly rooted in Christ, in Whom we have died, but in Whom we will rise. This gives us hope, and confidence, in the face of any struggle! Not even death can separate us from the Love of God! And with our hearts and families centered on God, our homes and our parish then become places of light, peace, and life, oases for all those hurting and hungry. We become like Our Father, who gives His love and forgiveness and pours out His Holy Spirit on all.

This parish has already begun following Christ as disciples and stewards, but Our Lord comes to us again today, to invite us into a more

complete following after Him. Jesus asks your new pastor for trust, for courage, for prayer in continuing God's mission in this parish. But Fr. Haag cannot do this alone; he needs the commitment and cooperation of all of you. Today it is my joy to join you all in our worship of God through Christ. I pray that all of you will work with Father Michael Haag in seeking to be intentional disciples of the Lord and generous 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 Ss. 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.

¹ Matthew 16:19.

² 1 Peter 4:10.