

**Homily for the Installation of Father Kevin Laughery as
Pastor of Saint Jerome Parish, Troy, Illinois
and Saint James Parish, St. Jacob, Illinois
at Saint Jerome Church, Troy, Illinois**

August 19, 2017

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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 Kevin Laughery as Pastor of Saint Jerome and Saint James Parishes.

In the Gospels time and time again we see people who persistently come to the Lord to ask for what they need. They are ordinary people, living ordinary lives, that have heard of the things that our Lord has done for others. Confident that Jesus can also help them, they turn to Him in faith. Today in our Gospel we hear one such account, that of a woman who comes and cries out to the Lord to heal her daughter who is possessed by a demon. At first the disciples come to Jesus and ask Him to send the woman away, for they see her as a nuisance. But our Lord in His care and mercy speaks with the woman, and after they have finished speaking, He tells the woman that, due to her great faith in Him, her daughter would be healed and delivered from that which tormented her.

How often in our lives do we, like the woman in the Gospel today, need something from our Lord? While I would hope that we would not need one of our family members freed from the torment of demonic possession, we all have something for which we could use the grace of God to assist us. Whether it is His grace to live out our particular vocations in ways that lead us ever closer to Him, or the grace to accept something that we are struggling to accept, or even the grace to live as Christ's disciples more faithfully, all of us could come to the Lord more intently to ask for what we need. For our Lord did not give reluctantly to people what they sought, rather, He saw their great faith and gave them what they needed.

My dear brothers and sisters, may we always strive to have the faith to seek our Lord when things are going well and even when they could be better. For if we are to live as Christ's disciples in the midst of the world today, we are certainly going to need His grace to sustain us in our mission of building up the kingdom of God on earth so that we might one day inherit a place in the Heavenly kingdom when our work here on earth is finished.

Today at this Mass we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Saint Jerome Parish with the Installation of your new Pastor. I am very pleased that Father Laughery has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic community of faith here at Saint Jerome Parish in Troy and Saint James Parish in Saint Jacob. I am deeply grateful to you, Father Laughery, for the way you have faithfully served the people of our diocese since your ordination. In particular for the past eleven years as the Judicial Vicar of the Diocese and as Pastor of Saint Mary, Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Sacred Heart and Saint Sebastian Parishes for the past seven years. At the same time, I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Father Alan Hunter, for his dedicated ministry as Pastor of Saint Jerome and Saint James Parishes for the past two years.

Father Laughery will now serve you as pastor in 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.”¹

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.”

Over the course of the years leading up to the publication of my pastoral letter, I gave much thought to how we could, as a diocese, begin a process of strategic planning for growth in the Church. The growth envisioned is far more than just a quantitative increase in the number of people or the amount of money available to our parishes and the diocese. It is also essential to ensure that we give significant attention to the quality of our growth as we seek to grow more deeply in holiness.

In my pastoral letter, I said that we must do four things to build a vibrant community of saints:

1. Invite people to join us in prayer, especially Sunday Mass (hospitality);
2. Study the Bible and learn more about Jesus and our Catholic faith (formation);
3. Provide the sacraments as signs of hope and paths of grace to heaven (prayer); and
4. Serve those in need by practicing charity and justice (service).

The verbs in these four action items correspond to the four pillars of stewardship and discipleship that we have begun talking about in our diocese: hospitality, formation, prayer and service. We can all communicate more broadly the message of invitation.

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.²

Stewardship recognizes that everything we have comes from God. We are stewards whether we recognize it or not and whether we like it or not. 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.

I am aware that such a plan for growth is ambitious, but it is one about which I am very optimistic, especially given what this diocese has to offer and the many ways in which various groups are already poised to contribute to that growth. 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.

Our priests are at the very heart of our journey forward. As Catholics, we rely first and foremost on God's grace. This grace comes to us through the sacraments of the Church of which the priests are the ministers. In a special way, it is the priest who celebrates the Eucharist for us, feeding us with the Bread of Life, nourishing and strengthening us for this journey.

Without the Eucharist, this way of life will never succeed. Without priests, we would not have the Eucharist. Therefore, we need our priests for this journey. I am very grateful for the fidelity with which our priests serve the diocese. They are men committed to the building up of the Kingdom and to the salvation of the souls of those in our diocese and beyond. Their example of tireless dedication is an inspiration to me and to

all of us of how we are likewise called to serve the Lord as committed disciples of Jesus Christ. It is their joyful, humble example that is, I believe, one of the major factors contributing to the growth in the number of seminarians studying for the priesthood in our diocese. They too, are signs of hope and encouragement to us as we continue this journey.

I pray that all of you will work with Father Laughery 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 Saint Jerome and Saint James Parishes, 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 1 Peter 4:10.

² 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>.