

**Homily for the Installation of Father Scott Thelander as
Pastor of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini Parish
Springfield, Illinois**

August 8, 2017

**† 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 Scott Thelander as pastor of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini Parish.

As Father Thelander officially begins his ministry as your Pastor, I think it is fitting that we call upon three saints in particular for their intercession to ask for divine graces for Father Thelander and Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini Parish: Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, Saint Dominic and Saint John Cantius.

The first is rather obvious. As patron saint of your parish, Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini holds a special place of daily intercession for the spiritual good of this local community of faith. Mother Cabrini accomplished amazing things during her lifetime. She traveled the world for 25 years, zealously spreading God's Word while founding orphanages, schools, and hospitals on three continents. She founded the Missionary

Sisters of the Sacred Heart in 1880. Born July 15, 1850 in Italy, she died December 22, 1917 in Chicago. In 1946, Pope Pius XII proclaimed Mother Cabrini a Saint, making her the first American Citizen Saint. In 1950, Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini was named Universal Patroness of Immigrants because of her efforts in helping immigrants around the world.

The second saint whose intercession I suggest is Saint Dominic, whose feast day we celebrate today. Saint Dominic was born in Spain in 1170. As a young man, Dominic came face to face with the powerful Albigensian heresy. The Albigensians, held to two principles—one good, one evil—in the world. All matter is evil, they taught, hence they denied the Incarnation and the sacraments. Dominic sensed the need for the Church to combat this heresy, and was commissioned to preach against it. He and his fellow preachers gradually became a community, which eventually became the Order of Preachers or Dominicans. Dominic's ideal, and that of his Order, was to link a life with God, study, and prayer in all forms, with a ministry of salvation to people by the word of God. His ideal was *contemplata tradere*: "to pass on the fruits of contemplation" or "to speak only of God or with God."

The third saint whose intercession I suggest is Saint John Cantius, the patron saint of the community to which Father Thelander belongs. Saint John was born in the small southern Polish town of Kenty on June 24, 1390, only thirteen miles from the birthplace of Pope Saint John Paul the Great. At the age of 23, he registered for studies at the Jagiellonian University, located in the not too distant city of Krakow – then, the capital of the Polish Kingdom. Founded 1364 by royal decree, it was the same university at which the astronomer, Nicolas Copernicus, would study almost 80 years later. After his ordination as a priest, Saint John Cantius was appointed a lecturer on Scriptures and was a popular preacher and parish priest for a few years before returning to his university position. Famous for his austerity and care for the poor, he was canonized in 1767.

Father Thelander, may these three great saints – Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, Saint Dominic and Saint John Cantius – not only intercede for you and your parishioners, but may they also be a source of inspiration.

Just a few moments ago, in our Gospel reading we heard a portion of the Gospel that is one of the most well-known, that of Jesus walking on the water. In recounting this event, we see that our Lord had come to the disciples while their boat was in the middle of a storm and was being

tossed about. Understandably, when the disciples saw the Lord coming toward them walking on the water, they were afraid and even cried out, "It is a ghost," but our Lord told them to have courage, that it was indeed He. Then *Peter said to him in reply, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."* He said, "Come." Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw how strong the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

At times throughout our lives, we may experience "storms" in our lives that seem to toss us about, but what we must remember is that, just as in this passage from scripture, our Lord is present in our lives to tell us to have courage and to give us the grace so that we might always live as His disciples in the midst of the world. In light of this realization, the question that we must ask ourselves is twofold: first, do we ask the Lord for the grace we need to be faithful witnesses to Him, and second, when we are given the grace that we ask for, do we use it to strengthen us, or do we, like Peter, doubt the ability of our Lord to help us overcome what at the time may seem impossible? May we ever strive to have the faith to ask for the

grace that we need in our lives, so that we might live as Christ's disciples and bear witness to him each and every day.

Today at this Mass we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini Parish with the Installation of your new Pastor. I am very pleased that Father Thelander has accepted the call to serve as the local shepherd of the Catholic community of faith here at Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini Parish in Springfield. I am deeply grateful to you, Father Thelander, for the way you have faithfully served the people of our diocese for the past two years as parochial vicar of Saint Katherine Drexel Parish as well as parochial administrator of Blessed Sacrament Parish from September of last year until this past March. At the same time, I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Sister Mary Jean Traeger for her dedicated ministry as pastoral facilitator of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini Parish and to Father Clint Honkomp as Priest Moderator, as well as to Monsignor John Ossola for his liturgical and sacramental assistance.

Father Thelander 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

qualitative growth that will guarantee sustainability for generations that follow.

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 will 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 Thelander 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 Frances Xavier 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 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>.