

**Homily for the Installation of Father Steve Thompson as Pastor of
Holy Family Parish, Granite City, and St. Mary & St. Mark Parish, Madison**

Tuesday, August 25th, 2020 - Ferial Mass for 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time

**† 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 Stephen Thompson as Pastor here at Holy Family Parish in Granite City and St. Mary and St. Mark Parish in Madison.

As we gather this evening for this Mass, we mark the beginning of a new chapter in the life of these parishes, and we are given beautiful words from scripture for our meditation and edification today and for the years to come. St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians to not “be quickly shaken in mind or excited,” encouraging them to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us,” against the fears and calamities of their own day. How appropriate these words are for us today! Countless concerns and fears bombard us daily from every side, yet, as St. Paul says elsewhere, “What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? ... No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us.”

What a great consolation Paul's reminder offers us! Nothing need cause us to fear because "our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, ... loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace."

My brothers and sisters, to follow Christ as His disciples is precisely to keep our hearts fixed on this truth regardless of what is happening in our world right now! Let us choose *eternal comfort* as our goal, that is, *eternal life* with Christ. Yes, there are many concerns and pressures, fears and burdens, that we carry here below, but Christ has conquered the worst evils that could possibly afflict us. More than that, He has *redeemed* them, and they now not only need never to overwhelm us - for we are sustained by God's grace - but also, they are precisely the means by which we will be sanctified - as long as we endure them with His grace.

I entrust St. Paul's message of hope - and keeping our focus on eternal life - to all of you as well as to your new pastor as he takes up the pastorate of these parishes. Today, my brother Stephen, you are entrusted with the care of these parishes, and Our Lord promises you His own strength and love to carry you through any challenge that you could face. Rely on Him, faithfully follow Him, bring your flock to Him, and you will have successfully accomplished the pastoral duty that has been entrusted to you.

With that confident trust in our hearts, we now turn in gratitude to God for Fr. Stephen Thompson who today is installed as your new pastor! He was ordained in 2010, and for his first 2 years of priesthood was a parochial vicar at our Cathedral in Springfield. After that he has spent the past eight years as Pastor of Holy Family Parish in Mt. Sterling and St. Thomas Parish in Camp Point. I also thank him today for his service to our diocese on our Ministry to Priests Team and Priests' Personnel Board, as well as on my College of Consultors.

I also wish to express my deep appreciation to Father Jeff Holtman for his dedicated ministry as your Pastor for the past ten years. Our prayers and thanks go with him as he begins his pastorate at Ss. Peter and Paul Parish in Alton.

Father Thompson 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.”¹ 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.²

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 Holtman, your parishes have 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 Stephen Thompson 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 Holy Family and St. Mary and St. Mark parishes, I urge you *not to be afraid*, for Christ is with you! Strive for holiness. 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>.