

**Homily for the Installation of Father Aloysius Ndeanaefo as Pastor of
Saint Mary Parish, Paris, and Saint Aloysius Parish, North Arm**

Mass for Sunday of the 14th Week in Ordinary Time, Year A | July 9, 2023 A.D.

**† 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 Aloysius Ndeanaefo as Pastor of Saint Mary Parish in Paris and Saint Aloysius Parish in North Arm.

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 or my delegate 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 Saint 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 these parishes 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 should 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 Father Valery Burusu and his priestly care of these parishes for the past five years. I also want to thank Father Aloysius Ndeanaefo for his own fidelity to the Lord, and obedience to me, in taking on this new assignment as your pastor at Saint Mary Parish in Paris and Saint Aloysius Parish in North Arm, while continuing to serve as Pastor of St. Michael Parish in Hume.

Father Aloysius was ordained on May 28th, 2005, and spent his first five years of priesthood as Parochial Vicar at Saints Peter and Paul Parish in Collinsville from 2005 to 2008, and then at Saint Mary Parish in Highland from 2008 to 2010. He then served first as Parochial Administrator and then Pastor at Saint Elizabeth Parish in Robinson and Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in

Oblong from 2010 to 2016. He also served as Chaplain at the Robinson Correctional Center from 2011 to 2012. Since 2016, Father Aloysius has served as Pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Villa Grove, which concluded as of June 30th, and Saint Michael Parish in Hume, which he will continue to serve.

Father Aloysius 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 consists of following Jesus as His disciples, as people who listen and learn from Him, and 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.

Saint Peter wrote of this realization and consequent conversion 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.

If we look briefly at our readings today, we find this larger vision of the Church's work underlined for us. In today's Gospel passage (Mt 11:25-30), Jesus invites all of you who labor and are burdened to come to Him and He will give you rest. He invites us to learn from Him, for He is meek and humble of heart. As such, Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy that we heard in our first reading from the Prophet Zechariah (Zec 9:9-10) that our Lord and Savior will be meek and humble. In our second reading, Saint Paul says in his Letter to the Romans (Rom 8:9, 11-13) that we must have the Spirit of Christ if we want to share in the gift of eternal life. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

What does it mean to be meek? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines meekness as being mild, deficient in courage, submissive and weak. The biblical understanding of meekness does not mean weakness. Meekness is essentially an attitude or quality of heart whereby a person is willing to accept and submit without resistance to the will and desire of someone else (cf. Peter 3:4). As Jesus submitted to the will and desire of His Father in Heaven, we too are called to imitate the example of Jesus in submitted our lives to the will of God, as we pray in the Our Father: "Thy will be done."

All of us are also called to this kind of fidelity: members of Jesus' entire Church, part of His larger mission, faithful to the will of God.

Now, your parishes have already begun following Christ as disciples and stewards, so when Our Lord comes to us again today in this Eucharist, these words are simply His gentle and merciful invitation to each of us into an even more complete following after Him. Jesus asks your new pastor for trust, for courage, and for prayer in continuing God's mission in these parishes. But your pastor 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 and receive the gift of His Son in this Eucharist. I pray that all of you will work with Father Aloysius Ndeanaefo 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 Saint Mary and Saint Aloysius 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 Matthew 16:19.

² 1 Peter 4:10.