

**Homily for the Installation of Father Martin Smith as Pastor of
Holy Ghost Parish, Jerseyville, and Saint Mary Parish, Fieldon, Illinois
Mass for Tuesday of the 22nd Week in Ordinary Time, Year 1 | September 5, 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 Martin Smith as Pastor of Holy Ghost Parish here in Jerseyville and Saint Mary Parish in Fieldon, Illinois, while retaining his duties as Pastor of Saint Francis Xavier Parish in Jerseyville and Saint Patrick Parish in Grafton.

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 evening 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 evening 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 Hyland Smith and his priestly care of these parishes for the past four years. Just this past Sunday, I installed him as the new Pastor of Saint Michael the Archangel Parish in Sigel, Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish in Neoga, and Sacred Heart Parish in Lillyville, Illinois. We wish him well and ask God’s blessings on him in his ministry in these new assignments.

At the same time, I thank Father Marty Smith for his own fidelity to the Lord, and obedience to me, in taking on these new responsibilities as your Pastor of Holy Ghost Parish here in Jerseyville and Saint Mary Parish in Fieldon, Illinois, while retaining his duties as Pastor of Saint Francis Xavier

Parish in Jerseyville and Saint Patrick Parish in Grafton. I am also grateful to Father Ramesh Matta, who was ordained a priest in India in 2007, for generously giving of himself to come to our country and accepting the assignment to serve as Parochial Vicar in these four parishes as well.

Martin Smith is well known to you, as he has served here in Jerseyville since 2017 and was parochial administrator of these four parishes for a while in 2019. He is a native of Mt. Zion, Illinois, and spent four years in the United States Army as a paratrooper (which included a tour in Iraq), studied economics, and has worked as a police officer. After he completed his seminary studies and formation at Mundelein Seminary in northern Illinois, it was my privilege to ordain him to the priesthood in our Cathedral in Springfield on May 23, 2015. After ordination, he served as Parochial Vicar at our Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and as Chaplain of Sacred Heart-Griffin High School in Springfield, before coming to Jerseyville in 2017.

Father Marty 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 discussions: **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 his First Letter to the Thessalonians, Saint Paul's instruction draws out faith's moral implications as believers await the

“Day of the Lord,” a concept steeped in Jewish prophetic and apocalyptic thought. Christians understand this “Day” as the time when Jesus returns in victory, a time as unknowable as when a thief comes in the night or as inevitable as the birth pangs of a pregnant woman. The images, which appear also in the Gospels, were already part of believers’ way of speaking about the end-time. Paul further describes it in contrasting terms: As children of light and day, we belong neither to darkness, night, sleep or drunkenness – with all that these meant traditionally. Rather, we are vigilant, alert, and sober. God has destined us not for wrath but for salvation. Paul tells us to encourage one another with these basic truths of faith.

The Thessalonians fear that the delay in Jesus’ coming will separate them from brothers and sisters who have already died, and/or exclude them from Jesus’ promises. Paul directs their thoughts away from these fears toward being prepared for the Lord’s return, which will come at an unknown, unexpected time. The children of light remain alert and vigilant, acting in accord with Jesus’ salvation.

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 Marty Smith 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 Holy Ghost Parish and Saint Francis Xavier Parish in Jerseyville, Saint Mary Parish in Fieldon, and Saint Patrick Parish in Grafton, I urge you to strive for holiness, to work and pray with your 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.