

**Homily for the Installation of Father Peter Chineke as  
Pastor of Saint Jude Parish, Rochester, Illinois  
Mass for the Vigil of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary | August 14, 2024**

**† 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 Peter Chineke as Pastor of Saint Jude Parish here in Rochester.

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. For example, 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” (Matthew 16:19).

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 this parish 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. Before officially installing your new Pastor, we offer thanks and gratitude to God for Father Chuck Edwards, who served as your Pastor for the past four years. We wish him well and ask God’s blessings on him as he awaits word from the Illinois Department for Veterans Affairs on his appointment as Chaplain of the Illinois Veterans Home in Quincy. Thank you also to Father Brian Alford and Father Dean Probst for your past service as Pastor, and for your presence to concelebrate this Mass with us this evening.

I also want to thank Father Peter Chineke for his own fidelity to the Lord, and obedience to me, in taking on this new assignment as your Pastor at Saint Jude Parish here in Rochester.

Father Peter Chineke is the son of Virginia and the late Pius Chineke. He grew up in the Catholic Diocese of Orlu, Imo State, Nigeria. Father Dominic Rankin and I had the privilege of visiting his hometown and home parish during our trip to Nigeria last January, which was a moving and memorable experience to see how the Catholic Church is growing rapidly in Africa. After being referred to our diocese with strong recommendations, we accepted him as a seminarian for our diocese and he studied at Saint Meinrad Seminary in Indiana. It was joy to ordain Father Peter Chineke as a priest for our diocese in 2020. The eight men I ordained that year were the largest group to be ordained for our diocese since 1964! Since his ordination in 2020, Father Peter Chineke has served as Parochial Vicar at our Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Springfield, Co-Chaplain of Sacred Heart-Griffin High School in Springfield, Parochial Administrator at Ss. Mary and Joseph Parish in Carlinville, Ss. Simon and Jude Parish in Gillespie, St. Joseph Parish in Benld, St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Decatur, Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Parish in Mt. Zion, and St. Isidore Parish in Bethany. He has also served as Chaplain at St. Teresa High School in Decatur as well as Millikin University in Decatur. I have come to know Father Peter Chineke very well and can assure you that I am sending you a fine priest!

Father Peter Chineke will continue his part-time Graduate Studies in Canon Law online and in the summer program at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., as well as Associate Master of Ceremonies to the Bishop. Thank you to Father John Burnette for helping here this summer.

Father Peter Chineke will serve you now 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" (1 Peter 4:10). 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.

Our Gospel this evening for the Vigil of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is only two lines long, yet we would lose much to just skim over the words that St. Luke gives us of the woman from the crowd. We are all in the crowd of disciples that listen to Jesus, that want to follow Him, that want to receive His forgiveness and healing. That is precisely what it means to be a disciple, and so today, this woman becomes an example for all of us.

She calls out “Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.” Of course, she is right! As soon as we recognize Jesus as the Christ, as the Lord, as our God, we are amazed by the reality of the incarnation, that He has taken our flesh, and thus bestowed a marvelous grace on His mother! The Assumption is just the natural consequence of that: Jesus loved

His mother so much that He not only entrusted her with His bodily presence on earth, but He also wanted to give her the bodily experience of heaven. Having first received that grace of never falling into sin, not even original sin, she was capable of receiving that gift, and so God carried her, body and soul, into heaven. Truly, she was blessed, in soul and body!

Christ *wants to give that gift to each and every one of us!* And so He says, "Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it." Obviously, Mary, received the Word of God in a preeminent way, as St. John tells us of her conceiving Him: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Of course, St. Luke tells us elsewhere that Mary "pondered all these things in her heart," holding tight to the mysteries of God's work as they unfolded in her life. Yet Christ today promises that this indwelling of His word can also happen in us! We receive God's incarnate Word at every Mass that we prepare ourselves well to receive Holy Communion, and we can ponder the mysteries of His will whenever we take time to bring the ups and downs of our life into prayer with Him, or meditate on Sacred Scripture. Jesus tells us that all of His disciples can be blessed just like Mary: we too can be entrusted with His bodily presence here on earth, and promised our own bodily presence in heaven, if we only "hear the word of God and observe it." Let us give Him great thanks

for this promise, and renew today our desire to receive Our Lord frequently in the Eucharist!

Speaking of the Eucharist, it was just last month our National Eucharistic Congress took place in Indianapolis, where 60,000 Catholics gathered for this moving and memorable event, and countless more joined us via livestream. The National Eucharistic Revival, of which the Congress was a major part, now continues with a special Year of Mission, which calls for Catholics to share their rekindled love of the Eucharist with other people. This is an essential aspect of our being disciples of Jesus Christ and stewards of God's gifts of creation.

Now, your parish has already begun following Christ as disciples and stewards, so when Our Lord comes to us again today in this Eucharist, each of us is invited 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 this parish. 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 Peter Chineke 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 Jude Parish here in Rochester, 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.