

**Homily for the Installation of Reverend Rafał Pырchla as Pastor of
Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Parish, Mt. Zion, Illinois, and
Saint Isidore Parish, Bethany, Illinois**

Mass for Sunday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time, Year B | August 18, 2024, 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 Rafał Pырchla as Pastor of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Parish in Mt. Zion, and Saint Isidore Parish in Bethany, Illinois.

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 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 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 morning 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 Peter Chineke and his priestly care of these parishes during this past year, and Father Jason Stone, who served as your Pastor from 2020 to 2023, and Father Steve Arisman, who served as your Pastor from 2016 to 2020 as well as Father Rafał’s Pastor in Quincy.

I also want to thank Father Rafał Pyrchla for his own fidelity to the Lord, and obedience to me, in taking on this new assignment as your Pastor of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Parish in Mt. Zion and Saint Isidore Parish in Bethany.

Rafał Pyrchla was born on April 13, 1986, in Pilzno, Poland. His father died when he was eight years old. His mother's name is Sophia. He has three

brothers, Damian, his twin brother Bartłomiej, and Karol. He grew up in a small town, located about 60 miles from Cracow, and was raised in a very traditional Catholic family. He lived close to his local church, where he liked to spend a lot of time. From an early age he served Holy Mass as an altar boy, and later as a lector. He had a very good relationship with his parish pastor. He likes to play soccer and is also interested in basketball.

After completing high school, he made the decision to enter the Polish seminary. During his time in the Polish seminary he decided to come to the United States to work here as a priest for the Church in America. To prepare for this, he spent a year studying the English language at Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Cracow. He came to the United States on August 19, 2013, and spent a year studying at Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Orchard Lake, Michigan, near Detroit. It was a year to continue learning English and to choose the diocese in which he would work as a priest in the future. During this year, his seminary was visited by the vocation directors of many American dioceses. Father Brian Alford, Vocation Director of our diocese, visited his seminary and told the seminarians about our diocese and our need for priests. He visited our diocese and made the decision to apply to the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. Obviously, he was accepted!

After completing his theological studies and seminary formation at St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in Indiana, Father Rafał was ordained a priest by me on May 27, 2017. He has served as Parochial Vicar at the parishes of Our Saviour Parish in Jacksonville, St. Fidelis in Arenzville, St. Alexius in Beardstown, St. Luke in Virginia, and St. Francis Solanus in Quincy. He has also served as Chaplain at MacMurray College in Jacksonville and Routt Catholic High School in, Jacksonville.

Father Rafał 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.

If we look briefly at our readings today, our first reading from the Book of Proverbs (Prv 9:1-6) and our second reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians (Eph 5:15-20) both speak of the importance of living as wise persons and avoiding foolishness. Certainly, a pastor needs wisdom to avoid the foolishness of this world, so we pray for God to bless Father Rafał with the gift of wisdom to serve as a wise pastor.

Our passage from the 6th Chapter of Saint John’s Gospel (Jn 6:51-58) continues Our Lord’s discourse on the Bread of Life. Jesus said to the crowds: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread

will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. . . . Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.” Those who heed this message are truly wise, because eternal life is our goal, and Jesus shows us the way to heaven.

This Gospel message about Jesus being the Bread of Life is very timely, coming just a few weeks after our National Eucharistic Congress took place last month 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 parishes have 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 Rafał Pырchla 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 Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Parish in Mt. Zion, and Saint Isidore Parish in Bethany, 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.