

**Homily for the Installation of Father Michael Friedel as
Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish, Springfield, Illinois
Mass for Sunday of the 21st Week in Ordinary Time, Year B | August 25, 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 Michael Friedel as Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish here in Springfield.

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 Jeffery Grant, who has served as your Pastor for the past thirteen years. We wish him well and ask God’s blessings on him now as *Pastor Emeritus* of this parish. *Emeritus* is a Latin word that means “having served out one’s time.” The word was originally used to describe soldiers who had completed their duty. You might say that it is sort of an honorable discharge! We are grateful to Father Grant for having fulfilled his duty honorably as your pastor. Like many of our senior priests, I am sure that Father Grant will continue to make himself available for priestly ministry as needed.

I also want to thank Father Michael Friedel for his own fidelity to the Lord, and obedience to me, in taking on this new assignment as your Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish here in Springfield.

Michael Friedel I was born on November 17, 1988 in Alton, Illinois and was baptized on August 27, 1989. Congratulations on celebrating your 35th anniversary of your baptism this coming Tuesday! We would not be here installing you today as pastor if you had never been baptized! Yesterday was the anniversary of my baptism. I would not be installing you today as pastor if I had never been baptized!

Father Friedel's parents belonged to St. Kevin's Catholic Church in East Alton, Illinois, where he attended the Catholic grade school. He attended Marquette Catholic High School in Alton and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he majored in engineering. He went to Sunday Mass regularly on campus at St. John's Catholic Newman Center. After his junior year of college, he applied for and was accepted to his first job: working as a Totus Tuus missionary for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. Teaching Catholicism to youth throughout our diocese, he found himself attracted to the idea of working in service of other people. As he grew in the practice of his Catholic faith, he began to discern a call to the priesthood.

After doing his pre-theology studies at Mundelein Seminary, he attended the Pontifical North American College in Rome and obtained the licentiate in sacred theology degree with a specialization in biblical theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. It was a great joy for me to ordain Father Michael Friedel to the sacred priesthood in 2017.

Since his ordination as a priest, Father Friedel has served as Parochial Vicar at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and as Chaplain at Sacred Heart-Griffin High School here in Springfield. He served as Associate Director of the Office for Vocations from 2019 to 2021 and as Associate Vocation Director for the Springfield Deanery from 2021 to 2024. In 2020, he was appointed Pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish and St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Decatur, as well as Chaplain at Millikin University in Decatur. He also serves our diocese as a member of the College of Consultors.

Father Friedel 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 passage from the 6th Chapter of Saint John's Gospel continues Our Lord's discourse on the Bread of Life that we have been reading over the past few weeks (Jn 6:60-69).

Jesus' teachings are hard and many of the disciples were not able to accept them. So, they left Jesus and returned to their former lives. The way of the cross and the narrow road were too difficult. But Peter is willing to accept the challenge and, even more importantly, he is ready to accept the truth. The Twelve realized how difficult it was but were compelled to stay. When Jesus asks the Twelve Apostles if they want to leave Him, too, Peter answers on behalf of the Twelve, saying, "To whom shall we go?" In other words, once we have the truth in our grasp how can we turn to anything else?

The twelve tribes of Israel came to the same conclusion back in Joshua's time, as we heard in our first reading (Jos 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b). When he bluntly asks them to decide then and there if they are going to continue to serve the Lord, we see that they were not willing to abandon themselves to the ways of their surrounding culture. They chose to stay the course, to serve the Lord, and not forget what God had done for them. In the same way, the twelve apostles chose faithfulness and service in their time.

So, what does all this mean for us today? Well, each of us is confronted with a choice. Do we choose to follow God, or are we led along by the culture of our time and place? Do we accept the hard teachings of Jesus, or do we take the easier road and walk away? Do we choose truth and goodness, or do we

allow our hearts to succumb to the evil and darkness of this world? We do not merely make this choice once in our lives. We make this choice day by day and moment by moment.

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 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 Michael Friedel 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 Blessed Sacrament Parish here in Springfield, 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.