

**Homily for the Installation of Fr. Maurice Yonta as Pastor of St. Augustine Parish,
Ashland; St. Luke Parish, Virginia; and St. Fidelis Parish, Arenzville,
at St. Augustine Church, Ashland, Illinois
Mass for Friday of the 21st Week in Ordinary Time, Year 2 | August 30, 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 Maurice Yonta as Pastor of St. Augustine Parish in Ashland, St. Luke Parish in Virginia, and St. Fidelis Parish in Arenzville.

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 Daren Zehnle, who has served as Pastor here at St. Augustine Parish in Ashland for the past seven years. We wish him well and ask God’s blessings on him now as Chaplain and Director of Campus Ministry at Quincy University. We are also grateful for the ministry of Father Paul Habing for serving as Pastor of St. Luke Parish in Virginia and St. Fidelis Parish in Arenzville for the past year. He will now focus on being Pastor of Saint Alexius Parish in Beardstown, where the Spanish and French speaking communities are growing. In fact, Father Paul spent seven weeks this summer in French immersion studies to better serve the French-speaking community!

I also want to thank Father Maurice Yonta for his own fidelity to the Lord, and obedience to me, in taking on this new assignment as your Pastor at St. Augustine Parish in Ashland, St. Luke Parish in Virginia, and St. Fidelis Parish in Arenzville.

Father Maurice Yonta was born on September 22, 1970, in Cameroon, Africa. He was ordained on July 10, 2004, as a priest of the Pallottine Fathers, officially named the Society of the Catholic Apostolate. He served as a Parish Priest in several assignments in Cameroon. His studies included the Pallottine Institute and Claretianum in Rome, Italy. He came to our diocese in 2019 and was assigned as Parochial Vicar at St. John Vianney Parish in Sherman and Holy Family Parish in Athens. From 2021 to 2024, he served as Pastor of Holy Family Parish in Athens and St. Peter Parish in Petersburg.

Father Maurice Yonta 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 reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians invites us to reflect on what it means to be wise. A typical understanding might be that being learned and educated makes one wise. But the gifts of the Holy Spirit make it clear that wisdom and knowledge

are very distinct gifts. For Saint Paul, wisdom implies an understanding of Jesus' crucifixion that surpasses mere mental knowledge. It emphasizes the wisdom of God that is far beyond human wisdom. Being wise requires internalizing our knowledge, experiencing and using it to live a better life. Certainly for Christians, this means understanding in a very real and tangible way that Jesus suffered and died for us, exemplifying the utmost love for the human race. God's wisdom far surpasses the world's wisdom.

God is not a distant, detached observer of what goes on in our lives and in our world but instead is intimately involved in all that we are and do. In allowing Jesus to suffer and die, God the Father would not allow his Son to be any different from other human beings who also suffer and die. Yet the suffering and death of Jesus Christ were redemptive for us all because they were followed by the resurrection, the ultimate gift of eternal life.

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins in today's Gospel teaches that we should be like the wise young women who brought extra oil. We do this by living as faithful followers of Jesus, never relaxing our efforts to do so.

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 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 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 Maurice Yonta 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 St. Augustine Parish, St. Luke Parish, and St. Fidelis Parish, 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.