

**Homily for the Installation of Reverend J. Braden Maher as Pastor of
Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Illinois
Mass for Sunday of the 22nd Week in Ordinary Time, Year B | September 1, 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 Braden Maher as Pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish here in Decatur.

Mis queridos hermanos y hermanas en Cristo: Es bueno para nosotros estar aquí hoy para esta Misa y Rito de Instalación del Padre Braden Maher como Párroco de la Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de Lourdes aquí en Decatur.

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 Michael Friedel and his priestly care of this parish during the past four years. We wish him well in his new assignment as Pastor of Blessed Sacrament Parish in Springfield, where I installed him as Pastor last Sunday.

Thank you to Father Rick Weltin, who previously served as your Pastor. It is good that you are here to concelebrate this Mass with us today.

I also thank Father Braden Maher for his own fidelity to the Lord, and obedience to me, in taking on this new assignment as your Pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Decatur. At the same time, we welcome Father Wayne Stock as Parochial Vicar of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish.

También agradezco al Padre Braden Maher por su propia fidelidad al Señor, y su obediencia hacia mí, al asumir esta nueva tarea como su Párroco de la Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de Lourdes en Decatur. Al mismo tiempo, damos la bienvenida al Padre Wayne Stock como Vicario Parroquial de la Parroquia de Nuestra Señora de Lourdes.

Joseph Braden Maher was born in Kewanee, Illinois, on November 10, 1989. When he was in kindergarten his family moved to Vandalia. After his first year of public high school in Vandalia, he transferred to St. Anthony High School in Effingham. After graduating from high school, he went to Conception Seminary College in Conception, Missouri, before transferring to Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary and Marian University in Indianapolis. He attended major seminary at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in southern Indiana. It was a joy for me to ordain Father Braden to the priesthood on May 28, 2016, at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Springfield, where he served in his first priestly assignment as Parochial

Vicar for the next two years. He then was assigned as Parochial Vicar at the Parishes of Our Saviour Parish in Jacksonville, St. Alexius in Beardstown, St. Fidelis, in Arenzville, and St. Luke in Virginia. During that time, he served as Chaplain at MacMurray College in Jacksonville. For the past five years, Father Braden has served as Pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Charleston, as well as Chaplain at Eastern Illinois University Newman Center, in Charleston. For the past three years, Father Braden has also been Associate Vocation Director for the Mattoon Deanery.

Joseph Braden Maher nació en Kewanee, Illinois, el 10 de noviembre de 1989. Cuando estaba en el Kindergarten, su familia se mudó a Vandalia. Después de su primer año en la escuela secundaria pública en Vandalia, se transfirió a la escuela secundaria St. Anthony en Effingham. Después de graduarse de la escuela secundaria, fue al Conception Seminary College en Conception, Missouri, antes de transferirse al Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary y a la Marian University en Indianápolis. Asistió al seminario mayor en el Seminario y Escuela de Teología de Saint Meinrad en el sur de Indiana. Fue una alegría para mí ordenar al Padre Braden al sacerdocio el 28 de mayo de 2016, en la Catedral de la Inmaculada Concepción en Springfield, donde sirvió en su primera asignación sacerdotal como Vicario Parroquial durante los

próximos dos años. Luego fue asignado como Vicario Parroquial en las Parroquias de Nuestra Salvador en Jacksonville, San Alejo en Beardstown, San Fidelis, en Arenzville, y San Lucas en Virginia. Durante ese tiempo, se desempeñó como Capellán en MacMurray College en Jacksonville. Durante los últimos cinco años, el Padre Braden ha servido como Párroco de la Parroquia de San Carlos Borromeo en Charleston, así como Capellán en el Newman Center de la Eastern Illinois University en Charleston. Durante los últimos tres años, el Padre Braden también ha sido Director Asociado de Vocaciones para el Decanato de Mattoon.

Father Braden Maher 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.

En el otoño de 2015, publiqué mi segunda carta pastoral, titulada, *Ars Crescendi in Dei Gratia*, que en latín significa “El arte de crecer en la gracia de Dios”. En él, escribí: “El arte de crecer en la gracia de Dios es la clave para el crecimiento en la Iglesia. La construcción de una cultura de crecimiento en la Iglesia comienza con invitar a las personas a experimentar el amor de Jesucristo”.

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.

En 2017 concluimos nuestro Cuarto Sínodo Diocesano en el que el clero, los religiosos consagrados y los delegados de las 129 parroquias de esta diócesis votaron claramente para adoptar una docena de declaraciones sobre cómo debemos vivir nuestra identidad como discípulos y administradores en esta diócesis para los próximos años. La primera de estas declaraciones fue una respuesta audaz al llamado de Dios: “La misión de la Diócesis Católica Romana de Springfield en Illinois es construir una comunidad ferviente de discípulos misioneros intencionales y dedicados del Señor Resucitado y administradores firmes de la creación de Dios que buscan convertirse en santos. En consecuencia, la comunidad de fieles católicos en esta diócesis está comprometida con el estilo de vida de discipulado y administrador tal como lo ordenó Cristo Nuestro Salvador y como lo revelan las Sagradas Escrituras y la Tradición”.

Cuatro pilares, áreas esenciales para nosotros como discípulos, surgieron de esas discusiones sinodales: **hospitalidad, oración, formación y servicio**. En otras palabras, somos el tipo de cristianos católicos que invitarán a las personas de manera proactiva a unirse a nosotros en la oración, especialmente en la misa dominical; ofreceremos celebraciones bien preparadas de los sacramentos y otras ocasiones para **la oración** como signos de esperanza y

caminos de gracia hacia el cielo; estudiaremos la Biblia y **aprenderemos** más sobre Jesús y nuestra fe católica; y serviremos los unos a los otros, especialmente los necesitados, practicando la caridad y la justicia.

Our Scripture readings today call for consistency between what we believe inwardly, what we profess with our lips, and the way we act. As we heard in the letter of Saint James, “Be doers of the word and not hearers only.”

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 Braden Maher 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 Lourdes Parish in Decatur, 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.