

**Homily for the Installation of Reverend Father Varghese Anthony Puthussery, S.A.C.,
as Pastor Holy Family Parish, Athens, and Saint Peter Parish, Petersburg, Illinois.,
at Saint Peter Church, Petersburg, Illinois**

Mass for Sunday of the 23rd Week in Ordinary Time, Year B | September 7, 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 Varghese Anthony Puthussery, S.A.C., as Pastor of Holy Family Parish in Athens and Saint Peter Parish in Petersburg.

Although a new pastor officially receives the necessary authority to begin his parish ministry in his official decree of appointment from his bishop, my presence here to do this Rite of Installation is a reminder of an essential part of being a disciple, namely, 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 bishops or 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 and that commitment 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 Maurice Yonta, who served as your Pastor for the past three years. We wish him well and ask God's blessings on him now as of Pastor of St. Augustine Parish in Ashland, St. Luke Parish in Virginia, and St. Fidelis Parish in Arenzville.

I also want to thank Father Varghese for his own fidelity to the Lord, and obedience to me, in taking on this new assignment as your Pastor at Pastor of Holy Family Parish in Athens and Saint Peter Parish in Petersburg.

Father Varghese Anthony Puthussery was born on March 30 , 1961, in India. He made his final profession of vows as a member of the Society of the Catholic Apostolate, commonly known the Pallottine Fathers, founded by St. Vincent Pallotti in 1835 in Rome, Italy. He was ordained a priest on May 20, 1989. From 1989 to 1998, he served at various parishes in India. In 1998, he did graduate studies Loyola School of Theology at Manila University in the

Philippines, where he obtained his Master's Degree in Pastoral Theology in 2001. Returning to India, he became Executive Secretary of the Commission for Laity and Family for the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India, 2002-2010. In 2010, he served as Spiritual Director at the Pallottine Minor Seminary in Trivandrum Kerala, India, where he was appointed in 2011. From 2014 to 2020 he was Provincial Rector of his Pallottine Province in India. In 2020, he was appointed Pastor of St. George Church in Kerala, India, where he served until coming to the United States in 2023. For the past year, he has served as Parochial Administrator of St. John the Baptist Parish in Arcola, Forty Martyrs Parish in Tuscola, and Sacred Heart Parish, in Villa Grove.

Father Varghese Anthony Puthussery 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.

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, the prophet Isaiah tells us that, when the Savior comes, "the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will be cleared; then will the lame will leap like a stag, then the tongue of the dumb will sing."

In our Gospel passage today from Saint Mark, Jesus heals a deaf man who had a speech impediment, saying, “Ephphatha!” – that is, “Be opened!”

My brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called to open our ears to hear the Word of God and then speak of our faith so that others may come to believe that Jesus is Our Lord and Savior.

A few weeks ago, 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 Varghese 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 Holy Family Parish and Saint Peter 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.