

**Homily for the Installation of Reverend Callistus Osiaga as Pastor of
Immaculate Conception Parish, Pierron, Illinois; Saint Gertrude Parish, Grantfork,
Illinois; and Saint Nicholas Parish, Pocahontas, Illinois, at
Immaculate Conception Church, Pierron, Illinois**

Mass for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord | February 2, 2025, 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 Callistus Osiaga as Pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish here in Pierron, as well as Saint Gertrude Parish in Grantfork and Saint Nicholas Parish in Pocahontas.

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 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 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. This year marks

1,700 years since the Nicene Creed was officially adopted in the year 325 A.D. 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 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, I express my gratitude to Father Paul Bonk, who served as your Pastor for six years, from 2018 to 2024. Due to the untimely death of Father Stephen Sotiroff last summer, I needed to transfer Father Bonk to replace Father Sotiroff as Chaplain of Saint Anthony's Health Center in Alton and as Chaplain for the Sisters of Saint Francis of the Martyr Saint George in Alton.

I thank Father Callistus Osiaga for his own fidelity to the Lord, and obedience to me, in taking on this new assignment as your Pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish in Pierron, Saint Gertrude Parish in Grantfork, and Saint Nicholas Parish in Pocahontas.

Father Callistus Osiaga was born in Nigeria on May 5, 1964, and was ordained a priest on December 31, 1992, for the Diocese of Auchincloss. He served in

several parish assignments in his home diocese in Nigeria until his bishop gave permission for him to serve in our diocese in 2023, when he was assigned as Parochial Vicar at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Springfield. In April of last year, Father Osiaga was given the additional responsibility of serving as Chaplain at Springfield Memorial Hospital.

Father Callistus Osiaga 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.

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. This feast is associated with the blessing of candles for the New Year. It is a beautiful tradition reminding us that Christ is the light of the world and that His light dispels the darkness of suffering, evil and death. The lighted candles symbolize Simeon’s exclamation that this child is the Savior who is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.” Christ comes to save all peoples. The Presentation of the Lord in the Temple reveals the Christ Child as the light of the nations. His light gives hope to all those who walk in the shadow of death.

Today is also observed as the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life. Its purpose is “to help the entire Church to esteem ever more greatly the witness of those persons who have chosen to follow Christ by means of the practice of the evangelical counsels” of poverty, chastity, and obedience (Pope Saint John Paul II, 1997).

My brothers and sisters in Christ, last summer 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 Callistus Osiaga 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 Immaculate Conception Parish in Pierron, Saint Gertrude Parish in Grantfork, and Saint Nicholas Parish in Pocahontas, 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.