

**Homily for the Installation of Father Mark Tracy as  
Pastor of Christ the King Parish, Springfield, Illinois  
Mass for Sunday of the 18<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time, Year C | August 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 Mark Tracy as Pastor of Christ the King Parish here in Springfield.

Although Father Tracy officially began his new assignment here as Pastor of Christ the King Parish earlier last month on July 1<sup>st</sup>, we celebrate this Rite of Installation liturgically today not only to ask God's blessings on Father Tracy as he begins his ministry as shepherd of this flock, but also 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. The word apostle comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means "one who is sent out as a messenger." Bishops are successors of the apostles, and priests are collaborators with the bishops. As a successor of the apostles, I was sent here as Bishop of this Diocese in 2010 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, as a collaborator in the ministry of a successor of the apostles, 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? If Jesus is truly “Christ the King” as the title of this parish proclaims, 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 Christopher House, who has served as your Pastor for the past five years. We wish him well and ask God’s blessings on him now as he begins his new ministry as Dean of Formation and Director of Pastoral Formation at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in Saint Meinrad, Indiana. Father House will continue to have a close connection with our diocese in helping with the formation of some of our future priests for our diocese. He will also continue to serve as a judge in our Diocesan Tribunal and as a member of our diocese’s College of Consultors.

I now thank Father Mark Tracy for his own fidelity to the Lord and obedience to me in saying yes to this new assignment as your Pastor of Christ the King Parish here in Springfield and as my Vicar for Catholic Schools here in the Springfield Deanery. He will also continue to serve as a member of the College of Consultors for our diocese.

Mark Tracy was born on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1989. He is the son of Jim and Jil Tracy and is the third of four children. His home parish is Holy Family Parish in Mount Sterling. He attended Brown County High School in Mount Sterling and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he majored in recreation, sport, and tourism management - subjects that will certainly come in handy as your pastor! His hobbies are hanging out with friends, traveling, exercising, playing sports and watching Cardinals' baseball. In this regard, it is worth noting that the real Cardinals, that is, the College of Cardinals, elected a Chicago White Sox fan as our new Pope! Now your Bishop *and* the Pope are White Sox fans, so maybe it is time to rethink your baseball allegiance to that team in St. Louis!

After Father Tracy studied for the priesthood at Saint Meinrad Seminary in southern Indiana, it was my privilege to ordain him to the priesthood on May 26, 2018. After ordination, Father Tracy served as Parochial Vicar at St.

Anthony of Padua Parish in Effingham and St. Mary of the Annunciation Parish in Shumway. At St. Anthony High School in Effingham, Father Tracy taught theology and was an assistant coach for basketball and baseball part-time. For the past four years, he served as Pastor at Holy Family Parish in Decatur and also as Chaplain at St. Teresa High School for the past three years. Father Tracy also served part-time as Chaplain in the Illinois Army National Guard from 2019 to 2024, and continues to serve our country as Chaplain of the United States Army Reserve.

Father Tracy 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.*" I always mention that quote in my homily at the Installation Mass for every new Pastor that I have appointed. Even if you have heard it before, it is worth repeating because it is so basic and essential: *All pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness.* If we forget that, it will not take long to stray off course from what we should be doing in parish ministry and why we are doing it.

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 his Inaugural Mass in Saint Peter's Square on May 18, 2025, for the beginning of his Pontificate, Pope Leo XIV said, "Brothers and sisters, I would like that our first great desire be for *a united Church, a sign of unity and communion, which becomes a leaven for a reconciled world*. In this our time, we still see too much discord, too many wounds . . . For our part, we want to be a small leaven of unity, communion and fraternity within the world. We want to say to the world, with humility and joy: Look to Christ! Come closer to Him! Welcome His word that enlightens and consoles! Listen to His offer of love and become His one family: *in the one Christ, we are one.*"

In today's Gospel passage from Saint Luke (Lk 12:13-21), Jesus tells a parable of a rich man who seeks to secure his future by obtaining even more wealth than he already had. Notice that the issue is not simply the wealth itself. The whole story would take on a different meaning if the rich man were attempting to gain more wealth in order to serve others better and meet the needs of the poor and the destitute. But that is not the case. The rich man wants to store up wealth in order ultimately to be able to live a life of extravagant luxury without care or worry.

The rich man understands security in terms of abundant wealth: The more one possesses, the more secure the person will be. This kind of mentality, of course, leads directly to greed. Wealth and greed have deceived this rich man into thinking that he is in charge of his future. There is a fatal flaw in this understanding. We humans do not have ultimate control over our lives. The reality we must all eventually face is our mortality, and God alone is in charge of this. There is no such thing as being secure against the reality of death. No amount of wealth or possessions will secure one's life. God controls our ultimate destiny. This calls for a total rethinking of what real security is. The real question must focus on what matters to God: How might one be rich in the things of God? Only this provides someone with real security.

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 seek the comfort of riches and pleasure to satisfy our selfish desires? 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.

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 to receive the gift of His Son in this Eucharist. I pray that all of you will work with Father Mark Tracy 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 Christ the King 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.