

**Homily for the Mass of Installation for Father Nathan Marzonie, O.M.V.,  
as Pastor of St. Mary Parish, Alton., Illinois  
Mass for Monday of the 34<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time, Year 1 –  
Memorial of Saint Andrew Dung Lac and Companions (Vietnamese Martyrs)  
November 24, 2025**

**† 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 this evening for this Mass and Rite of Installation of Father Nathan Marzonie, O.M.V., as Pastor of Saint Mary Parish here in Alton.

Although Father Nathan officially began his new assignment here as Pastor of Saint Mary Parish earlier this month, we celebrate this Rite of Installation liturgically today not only to ask God's blessings on Father Nathan 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, 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 Uhl, O.M.V., who served as your previous Pastor. We wish him well and ask God's blessings on him now as he begins his new ministry at San Pedro Catholic Church in North Port, Florida as a member of the Oblate Community in Venice, Florida.

I now thank Father Nathan Marzonie for his own fidelity to the Lord and obedience to his Provincial Rector, Father James Walther, and me in saying yes to this new assignment as your Pastor of Saint Mary Parish here in Alton.

Nathan Marzonie was born thirty-six years ago. He is the fifth of six children born to George and Lisa Marzonie. His hometown is Flushing, Michigan, and later his home parish was San Pedro Catholic Church in North Port, Florida, where he served most recently as Parochial Vicar before being assigned here in Alton. He graduated from the University of Michigan with Bachelor of Science degrees in Molecular Biology and Clinical Chemistry. He attended St. John's Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts. It was a great privilege for me to have ordained Father Nathan to the priesthood, along with Father Leland Thorpe, right here in Saint Mary Church on August 13, 2022. Father Nathan's hobbies are hiking, reading science fiction, cooking or trying strange foods, learning foreign languages, playing cribbage or backgammon, playing and listening to music. A little-known fact about Father Nathan is that he was a tongue-twister champion in grade school!

Father Nathan 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 first reading (Daniel 1:1-6, 8-20), the author of the Book of Daniel, writing in the second century before Christ, depicts the seductive ways of a king named Nebuchadnezzar, known for his maltreatment of the Jews. The Chaldeans (later known as the Babylonians) had conquered Jerusalem six centuries before Christ. Jewish dietary restrictions excluded any food offered by pagans. But Daniel’s fasting only makes him healthier and stronger. God’s protection extends even to the steward who listens to Daniel and withholds food provided him by the king. Daniel and his companions share extraordinary gifts of wisdom and knowledge; these allow them to resist faithfully the evil designs of the king and his minions.

In today’s Gospel passage from Saint Luke (Lk 21:1-4), the widow and her two very small coins call forth praise for her and a continuing condemnation of those who abuse power and oppress the poor. Jesus notes that “others have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood.” In a similar way, the prayer of

Saint Ignatius says, "Take, O Lord, and receive [my entire life]. . . . I surrender it all to you."

Today's Memorial of Saint Andrew Dung-Lac and Companions commemorates the martyrs of Vietnam who literally surrendered their lives for the Lord. Andrew Dung-Lac, a Catholic convert ordained to the priesthood, was one of 117 people martyred in Vietnam between 1820 and 1862. In 1832, Emperor Minh-Mang banned all foreign missionaries, and tried to make all Vietnamese deny their faith by trampling on a crucifix. Like Daniel and his companions resisting the evil King Nebuchadnezzar, Saint Andrew Dung-Lac and Companions refused the demands of the evil Emperor of Vietnam. For this, they won the crown of martyrdom and were canonized saints by Pope Saint John Paul II.

We too are called to follow Christ as missionary disciples and stewards of God's creation, 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 Nathan Marzonie 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 Saint Mary Parish here in Alton, 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.