

Sunday 31-A

Installation of Father Thao Ngoc Dinh

St. Joseph's Church

5 November 2017

Dear Father Thao, brother priests and dear parishioners of St. Joseph's Church:

Introduction

This morning this community of faith gathers to give thanks and praise to God by offering the Eucharist, as it does Sunday after Sunday, but also to celebrate the formal installation of your new pastor, Father Thao. At this Holy Mass he will formally assume the ministry of serving as your spiritual father and shepherd.

But what does a pastor do, and why is he being installed? First to the last question, why an installation? Is Father Thao not already your pastor? Indeed, he is. Although the Church does not prescribe a Rite of Installation as canonically necessary, it is a public way for a parish family to recognize and welcome the appointment of its new pastor. He comes to you to continue the pastoral care, following upon the ministry which Father Paul offered so generously and with such dedication and compassion.

So, what are the responsibilities of a pastor? What is his mission to you as a community of faith?

As pastor, then, he will faithfully celebrate with you and for you the Church's Sacraments, above all by offering Holy Mass; he will

proclaim to you forcefully, persuasively and in full fidelity to the mind of the Church the challenge of God’s Word as a riveting “two-edged sword,” which as you heard in today’s Second Reading, is not just “a human word but . . . the word of God” (1 Thes 2:13). As your shepherd, he will also work with you to build up your parish as a living cell of the Body of Christ by encouraging you to be his disciples and to serve one another and the wider community.

Father Thao undertakes this mission and responsibility by offering the care of his spiritual fatherhood to all of you. And he will be able to accomplish all this – and I know he will – with the support of your prayers and your spirit of collaboration.

In his apostolic exhortation, “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis challenges parishes to be communities which reach out and bring the Gospel to those around them – first of all, of course, to their own families, but also to their neighbours, co-workers and others. Your pastor is called to lead you in responding to this call of Pope Francis to be, as he wrote, a parish that is “completely mission-oriented.” Your parish is to have missionary outreach to others at the heart of its mission. “In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers”;¹ that is, to reach out to others, to invite them to come to

¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

know God's merciful love for them. Led by your spiritual father, this parish, like every other parish in the world, is being called to bring the joy of the Gospel to those who have not yet recognized God's love for them.

While your parish rightly has a prayer life centred on the Word of God and the Sacraments, through which its members grow to maturity in Christ (cf. Eph 4.13), no parish exists only for itself. Your mission is to make disciples for the Lord (cf. Mt 28.19) and to spread his kingdom. This requires the full participation of all the faithful in the parish.

To many in our day, the call to go out and evangelize sounds foreign and its relationship to parish life can be difficult to see. Yet the truth is that the Church exists to evangelize; it is her deepest calling. This sacred duty and privilege falls not only to the pastor, but to all the faithful; indeed, it would be impossible to carry out without their involvement. By responding to this call, we recognize our Christian identity and imitate our Master, the Good Shepherd, who "came to seek out and to save the lost" (Lk 19.10).

You yourselves must become missionaries of Christ to your brothers and sisters wherever they live, work, study or pass their free time. Faith must be lived together, and the family and the parish are the places in which we learn to live our faith as part of our daily life.

Welcome was a primary mark of the early Christian community. In

the parish today it is reflected in various ways, creating a sense of belonging, active participation, responding to pastoral needs, and always ready to receive others into associations and groups.

Today's Gospel

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks strongly once against hypocrites, here the religious authorities who placed heavy obligations on others that they did not practice themselves. But the same thing can be said of parents who, for example, tell their children to go to PREP but do nothing themselves to grow in their faith, or those who drop their children off for Mass but do not attend themselves. They do not practice what they preach.

Jesus is also harsh with those who try to place themselves above others. While for us it might not be about getting the best seats in synagogues, we do know that even in parish groups or associations or movements there are those who seek to dominate and control others. Jesus tells us that for his disciples it should be different. We are all to be submissive to our father in heaven and to the one teacher of all, Jesus Christ. We are all brothers and sisters of equal dignity; all received the same Baptism! "You are all brothers and sisters," he said (Mt 23:8).

The Lord is not literally saying that we should not call our parents "father" and "mother," but he does want us to think first about what binds us together; and second, that any title or position in the community

brings the obligation not to be served, but to serve (cf. Mk 10:45).

He could not be clearer. The “greatest” among the disciples is not the one who takes honours to himself, who lords it over others by controlling them, but the one who is a “servant”: “the greatest among you will be your servant” (Mt 23:11).

To sum up what the Church places before us today, then, we have a picture of a disciple, a friend of Jesus who knows him personally who is called to do three things. First, to be an active, welcoming member of the parish community under the direction of the pastor; second, to be a missionary who goes beyond the parish to bring the Good News to others, not hoarding it in the family or the parish; and third, to have the attitude of being a “servant” to others, someone who sees in Christ’s sacrificial death, the pattern of love he is called to imitate.

Conclusion

We now proceed to the Rite of Installation.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver