

## **Sunday 26:B**

### **Installation of Father Alessandro Lovato**

St. Helen

30 September 2018

Dear Father Lovato, Father Konrad, Deacon Pat, and dear brothers and sisters of St. Helen's Parish:

#### ***Introduction***

As always on the Day of the Lord, today this community of faith at St. Helen's gathers to give thanks and praise to God by offering the Eucharist, but also to celebrate the formal installation of your new pastor, Father Alessandro Lovato. At this Holy Mass, after the homily, he will formally assume his 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 Lovato 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. Father Alessandro comes to you to continue the pastoral care, offered so generously and with such dedication by Father Leonardo Rocha, a compassionate shepherd and to whom I owe my gratitude for his ministry with you.

So, what are the responsibilities of a pastor? What is Father

Alessandro's mission to you as a community of faith? As pastor, Father will faithfully celebrate with you and for you the Church's Sacraments, above all by offering Holy Sacrifice of the 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 rivetting "two-edged sword." 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 serve one another and the wider community.

He 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, released "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, above to their children, but also to their neighbours, co-workers and others. Father Lovato is called to lead you in responding to this call of the Holy Father to be, as he wrote, a parish that is "completely mission-oriented." He describes the parish – and, I think, we can say, your parish of St. Helen – in this way: "The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation,

charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.”<sup>1</sup>

Led by your spiritual father, Father Alessandro, 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.

You, then, are called to be missionary-disciples: nourished by the sacramental life of the Church you are being prepared to “go forth” and live and proclaim the Gospel.

### ***Gospel***

The Gospel reports three sayings of Jesus, each of which challenges us to probe deeper into what the Lord is telling us.,

#### ***First Saying***

At the Gospel’s beginning Jesus’ disciples report to him that a man not of their company was casting out demons in Jesus’ name. The disciples tried to stop him and reported to this to the Lord. The disciples evidently thought that casting our demons in Jesus’ name was their prerogative, and theirs alone.

As the apostles see it, unless a person is a member of their group, their tribe, he is an outsider; and, as an outsider, there is something wrong about that outsider’s using God’s power to do miracles.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 28.

In response, Jesus defends the outsider and rebukes the tribalism of his apostles. “Whoever is not against us is for us” (Mk 9:40), Jesus tells the disciples. <sup>2</sup>

The Gospel teaches us an important lesson. God works as he wants and through those whom *he* chooses, not those the disciples think fit. Rather than grumble about this, they should be glad that the grace of Christ is invoked even if such persons are not readily identified as followers.

The take-away? We should rejoice that God lavishes his love and mercy upon mankind, even beyond the visible boundaries of the Church.

***Second Saying: Scandal as a Stumbling Block***

Jesus then makes another statement which catches us up short: “If any one of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you thrown into the sea” (Mk 9:42).

If Jesus is tender and compassionate, he can nonetheless be stern and to those who dare to tempt anyone away from doing what is good. He is harsh with those who would lead others to sin, placing a “stumbling block” before them, which causes them to trip and fall.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Eleonore  
Stumpf: [www.liturgy.slu.edu/26OrdB093018/reflections\\_stump.html](http://www.liturgy.slu.edu/26OrdB093018/reflections_stump.html)

What Jesus is reminding us of here is the power of influence we have over others. While we cannot force others to sin, we certainly can tempt them, often by finding their weak spots and playing on them. As we all know, bad example in any number of ways can seriously hinder the Church's mission of handing on the faith.

Those in positions of authority, such as priests and bishops – and this has been tragically verified recently – whose duty it is to shepherd and preach the faith, are especially liable to give scandal whenever they fail to live truly Christian lives.

The consequence of such scandal is serious indeed: “it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea” (Mk 9:42).

### ***Third Saying: Gospel Radicalism***

The final sayings of Jesus are just as challenging as his words about leading others astray by scandal. Was Jesus exaggerating when he urged his followers to use drastic measures to avoid evil and its harmful consequences?

We take radical measures all the time in providing health care. Better to amputate the gangrenous member than to mortally infect the whole body. Better to cut through the abdominal wall and repair the hernia than to risk infection from a strangulated intestine. And so on. Just as a doctor might remove a limb or some part of the body in order to

preserve the life of the whole body, so we must be ready to part with anything that causes us to sin and which leads to spiritual death.

“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched” (Mk 9:43,45,47-48).

The lesson for us is not that we are to mutilate ourselves physically – Jesus’ healing ministry tells us that is not what he wants – but that we should realize that eternal life is worth any sacrifice which we may be called on to make. Commitment to one’s spouse means you need to cut off any other sexual relationship. If alcohol is addictive for you, drop it entirely. If social media threatens to harm family communication, put it away. If your job compromises your conscience, then you have to take action to remove yourself from the situation.<sup>3</sup>

Following Jesus is not easy. He doesn’t want to fool us with happy talk. What Jesus expects from you and me is following him, conforming

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Dennis Hamm: [www.liturgy.slu.edu/26OrdB093018/theword\\_hamm.html](http://www.liturgy.slu.edu/26OrdB093018/theword_hamm.html).

our lives to his; loving as he loved: “If anyone would serve me, let him follow me; where I am, there will my servant be” (Jn 12:25); “love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34).

We have to fight against the evil inclinations in our heart. But we also remember that we do not do so alone. With the power of his grace, Jesus is with us in our struggles, by our side, accompanying us on our journey with the power of his Word and Sacraments.

### ***Conclusion***

We now proceed to the Rite of Installation of your new pastor, Father Alessandro Lovato. His ministry, like all ministry in the Church is to serve you, the People of God. That is why the Lord instituted the ministerial priesthood. His responsibility is to feed you with the Bread of Life through his teaching and preaching, his celebration of the sacraments, above all the Eucharist, and his building up your community in holiness so that at the end of your pilgrimage you will be received with joy into the Father’s house.

\_ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver