

Sunday 33-B

Installation of Father Joseph Hieu Nguyen

St. Andrew

18 November 2018

Dear Father Joseph and Deacon Ken, and dear parishioners of St.

Andrew's Parish:

Introduction

As always on the Day of the Lord, today this community of faith at St. Andrew's gathers to give thanks and praise to God by offering the Eucharist, but today also to celebrate the installation of your pastor, Father Joseph Hieu Nguyen. 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 Joseph 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 Joseph comes to you to continue the pastoral care, offered so generously and with such dedication by Father Gomes, 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 Joseph's mission to you as a community of faith? For what can you hold him accountable? How is he your spiritual father who is to lead you to

Jesus?

As pastor, Father is faithfully to celebrate with you and for you the Church's Sacraments, above all by offering Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. He is to 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." As your shepherd, he is also called to 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. Yours is a vibrant community of many engaged parishioners. It is also "mission-minded" as I discovered during my parish visit last February, so there is a lot for Father to oversee and ministries where his collaboration is necessary.

He undertakes this mission and responsibility by offering the care of his spiritual fatherhood to all of you. That's his task. But he cannot and should not do this alone. Father Joseph will be able to accomplish all this – and I know he will – with the support of your prayers and your spirit of willingness to work together for the good of all.

Readings

It's clear that the days are becoming shorter and shorter, and the hours of night are lengthening. The Readings from the Liturgy take up this mood as well. In imitation of nature itself, the Church directs us to consider our own shortening of days by placing before us an important

question: Will there be an end of the world; and if so, when? And will it really be, as we heard proclaimed, a “time of suffering” with a darkened sun and moon as Jesus says in today’s Gospel (cf. Mk 13:24) and a “time of anguish” as foretold in the Prophet Daniel (cf. Dan 12:1)? As disciples of the Lord we cannot avoid such provocative questions, even though at first glance they might seem gloomy and even pessimistic.

Forecasting the End?

But we have to be careful. Jesus’ colourful language in Mark’s Gospel about the cataclysmic natural disasters of “those days” (Mk 13:24) should not be interpreted as if they were a literal description of the end of world history. At the time of Jesus a certain kind of language was used, called “apocalyptic,” to describe with vivid images the final establishment of God’s kingdom. They did this to portray realities beyond their experience. They drew on their imagination. The images are important because they suggest the reality, but they are not to be taken literally.¹

These frightening images about the end are, rather, to be interpreted in the light of the deeper meaning they contain: the true reality – not *when* the world will end or *how* it will.

¹ Cf. Walter J. Burghardt, *Still Proclaiming Your Wonders: Homilies for the Eighties* (New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1984), 151.

The history of the Church *is* advancing towards the goal of the Second Coming of Jesus, but Christ has not specified any chronological date when or how this will happen. That it *will* come is certain, but attempts to predict the precise time are not only foolish but take us away from what is really important.² Indeed, Jesus tells us quite clearly – and we take him at his word – “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the Angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mk 13:32).

But there is a Second Coming for each of us that is not so remote. It is his coming to us in the solemn moment of death, at the time of judgment when we are accountable to him and utterly dependent on his mercy.

But we need not be afraid of this coming. God’s relationship with us is not a story of harsh condemnation but a love story, a story of sheep lost in the desert but are not abandoned but rescued by the Good Shepherd who “leaps to his feet and abandons the glory of heaven, in order to go in search of the sheep and pursue [them] it, all the way to the Cross.”³

² Cf. John Paul II, General Audience (22 April 1998), 3.

³ Benedict XVI, Homily at the Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome (24 April 2005).

Such a consideration – the Son of God leaping to his feet to save us – invites us to look forward to Christ’s second coming at the end of our life and at the end of time.

Conclusion

We now begin the Rite of Installation with the reading of the letter of appointment by Deacon Ken.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver