



St. Patrick's, Vancouver  
31 July 2016

Dear Bishop-elect Joseph, brothers in the priesthood and diaconate, consecrated women and men, seminarians, parishioners here at St. Patrick's, always so welcoming to Archdiocesan celebrations, friends of Father Nguyen; brothers and sisters in Christ:

## *Introduction*

This afternoon, we gather – as we do every Sunday – to give thanks and praise to our gracious God for his goodness to us. But today we have a special reason for thanksgiving because the good Lord, through the appointment of Pope Francis has chosen our own beloved Father Joseph to be the sixth Bishop of the Diocese of Kamloops, succeeding Bishop David Monroe, who was also Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Vancouver when he was named.

We have come together to bid farewell and especially to pray for Bishop-elect Joseph: to express our gratitude for his nearly twenty-five years of dedicated, inspiring and effective priestly ministry in our local Church.

Upon his appointment Father Joseph expressed some bewilderment about why the Holy Father had chosen him for the episcopacy. But for those of us who know him, it was no surprise at all that he should pick him for this new mission in the Church. He was formed in a profoundly Catholic family – two priests and two Religious sisters among the children – and in the crucible of suffering in his tortuous escape on a boat from Vietnam, in his life a refugee camp in the Philippines, and his days as a painter struggling to learn English in Vancouver. As parochial vicar at St. Jude's Parish, Immaculate Conception Parish, Delta, and Corpus Christi Parish; and then pastor at Our Lady of Mercy Parish and St. Andrew's Parish: Pastor, 2001-2010, before becoming Director of Vocations and later Vicar General, he showed himself to be a true servant leader who inspires and leads by his humble yet determined witness of life.

Bishop-elect Joseph is known for his fatherly and compassionate approach in dealing with others. No doubt this zeal and welcoming attitude is one of the reasons why he has been able to attract so many lay people to assume their responsibility for carrying out the Church's mission. Father Joseph is a good team leader; he understands and lives what St. Paul writes in today's Second Reading: "there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian [and] Scythian, slave and free: Christ is all and in all" (Col 3:11). Over the years this has meant that for the projects which he undertakes, he can carry them out because of his ability to inspire others to want to work with him.

Father Joseph has always been dutiful, and happily so. Early in his pontificate, Pope Francis described the kind of priest he was looking for when appointing Bishops – and this would apply to his present choice:



Men who are guardians of doctrine not in order to measure how far away the world lives from the truth it contains, but in order to attract the world, to enchant it by the beauty of love, to seduce it with the offer of the freedom which is given by the Gospel. The Church does not need apologists for her causes nor crusaders for her battles but rather humble and confident sowers of the Truth who know that it is always given to them anew and who trust in its power.<sup>[1]</sup>

In Father Joseph the Pope found such a man.

When I asked him to be Vicar General, after Bishop Jensen was named to Prince George, I knew that above all he loved being a pastor, being with his people in celebrating the Sacraments, preaching powerfully and serving them with compassion. But in his letter of accepting the position of Vicar General he wrote this to me:

The words my Dad spoke to me right after my ordination 21 years ago kept echoing in my heard and pounding in my heart again and again: “Now you are a priest of the Church and your Bishop is your father. . . Obey your Bishop and serve the Church with obedience and humility.”

Father Joseph has interiorized his father’s words. He concluded his letter of acceptance to me by writing: “With God’s help, I place myself under your care and guidance to serve our Archdiocese joyfully with obedience and humility.”

And I know that the same words of his father resounded in his heart and mind when he received that call from the Nuncio that the Holy Father had chosen him to shepherd not just a single parish, but a communion of parishes in the local Church of Kamloops.

I should like to quote a saying of St. John Vianney, to whom Father Joseph has a particular devotion because he is the patron of priests, which applies to him. I have only changed the word “parish” in the original to “Diocese.” This is what the Curé of Ars wrote: “A good shepherd, a pastor after God’s heart, is the greatest treasure which the good Lord can grant to a Diocese, and one of the most precious gifts of divine mercy.”<sup>[2]</sup> Kamloops will indeed be blessed.

In leaving us, Father Joseph is being obedient to God’s Word: to imitate Jesus who was sent by the Father to take the form of a slave (cf. Phil 2:7) and who came not “to be served, but to serve” (Mk 10:45) and to bring the Good News (cf. Lk 4:18). As Pope Francis said just yesterday in Kraków, “Jesus directs us to a one-way street: that of going forth from ourselves. It is a one-way trip, with no return ticket. It involves making an exodus from ourselves, losing our lives for his sake (cf. Mk 8:35) and setting out on the path of self-gift. Nor does Jesus like journeys made halfway, doors half-closed, lives lived on two tracks. He asks us to pack lightly for the journey, – which is surely the message of today’s Gospel – [and] to set out renouncing our own security, with him alone as our strength.”<sup>[3]</sup> These words recall the motto our Bishop-elect has chosen: “*State in Domino*” (Phil 4:1), stand firmly in the Lord.

## ***The Readings***

Let me now turn to consider this Sunday’s Gospel: how it tells us how we are to live as friends and followers of Jesus today. The principal theme of the Liturgy of the Word is straightforward: if a person puts their trust in the riches of this world, such an individual will not live life to the full.



Although possessions are good insofar as they help to guarantee human dignity, they do not guarantee salvation. In St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus puts us, his disciples, on guard against thinking that our happiness lies in the accumulation of material things. If we are truly wise, then we will not set our hearts on the goods of this world, for all things are transient, all things can suddenly end.

Jesus teaches us that we should not make material possessions into a god, that life is fragile and ultimately in God's hands, and that we need to sort out what is really important and lasting in life before it is too late.

To illustrate his point, Jesus presents the Parable of the Rich Fool, containing a monologue by the rich man and God's judgment upon him. The rich man had a very good harvest. Instead of enjoying and sharing the fruits of his harvest, however, he put all his thoughts and energy into plans for building even larger barns to hold the abundance. As God continued to bless the man, instead of using his good fortune to further the will of God and his neighbour's well-being, all he was interested in was accumulating more wealth and planning an early retirement.

His words to himself are not unlike those we still often hear today: "relax, eat, drink, be merry" (Lk 12:19). But the new barns are never built, because the man dies suddenly. In the divine judgment he is addressed with those terrifying words, "You fool" (Lk 12:20).

Why did this man merit God's harsh condemnation of him as a "fool." Because he had full barns, but an empty heart and forgot what the meaning of life was really all about.

### ***Life Is More than the Accumulation of Riches***

At the heart of today's teaching is Jesus' warning that our lives are not primarily to be about gathering wealth for ourselves or even for our families. Life is so much more than the "abundance of possessions." If money and possessions are your master, that means God is not (cf. Mt 6:24).

In our life we must not let material possessions become more important than fulfilling our commitments to God, ourselves and other persons. Otherwise we too may merit the name, "You fool."<sup>[4]</sup>

What should we do instead? Put the Lord – his Kingdom and his People – in the midst of our lives and not to seek solely riches for our own pleasure. [We should] Flee the satisfaction of being at the centre of things and not build on the shaky foundations of power or settle into a comfortable life that compromises our zeal for the Lord. Disciples do not waste all their time planning a secure future, enclosed within the narrow walls of self-centredness. They find their happiness in the Lord. Not content with a life of mediocrity, they burn with the desire to bear witness to God's mercy and to reach out and serve others.<sup>[5]</sup>

The point of Jesus' parable is clear. Possessions do not guarantee happy life. Indeed they may make us so blind that we do not see what really matters most in life.

### ***Conclusion***



In today's Second Reading, Paul directs our attention to those treasures that endure and warns that greed for wealth and influence is a kind of idolatry. He advises the Colossians to put to death, "whatever is earthly" including greed, which is idolatry" (Col 3:5). For us Christians, the real treasure that we must seek in life consists in the "things above . . . where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1). In other words, Christ is the highest possession we can have.

That highest possession is now given to us in this Eucharist, when he offers us himself as the Bread of Life.

As we continue our celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, let us pray that in his episcopal ministry Bishop-elect Joseph will continue to be close to his people, a father and brother, who is gentle, patient and merciful; a bridegroom to the Church of Kamloops, who will faithfully and lovingly watch over the flock that will be entrusted to his pastoral care.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Francis, Address to a Meeting of the Congregation for Bishops (27 February 2014), 6.

<sup>[2]</sup> Cited by Benedict XVI, *Letter Proclaiming a Year for Priests* (16 June 2009).

<sup>[3]</sup> Francis, Address to Priests, Men and Women Religious, Consecrated Persons and Seminarians, Kraków (30 July 2016).

<sup>[4]</sup> Cf. Daniel Harrington, [http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article\\_id=10086](http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=10086).

<sup>[5]</sup> Cf. Francis, Address to Priests, Men and Women Religious, Consecrated Persons and Seminarians, Kraków (30 July 2016).