

Homily
Mass of Installation
Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle
January 4, 2017

Your Eminence, Cardinal Wuerl, Archbishop Pierre, my brother bishops and archbishops, local faith leaders and dignitaries, to my family, and my dear brothers and sisters in the Lord...I welcome you to the Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle, and I thank you for your presence here today as I am installed as the 5th bishop of Diocese of St. Petersburg.

Estimados hermanos y hermanas en el Señor,
Les quiero dar la bienvenida a ustedes aquí, en el día de hoy, al ser nombrado como el quinto obispo de la Diócesis de St. Petersburg. Yo hablo un poco de español, pero espero poder aprender más. También espero poder conocerles mejor y celebrar los Sacramentos con ustedes. Además, continuaremos el proceso de preparación para el quinto Encuentro Nacional en el (dos mil dieciocho-2018). Cuenten con mis oraciones y mi apoyo como su obispo.

A few days ago, we celebrated the beginning of a New Year. Today, also marks the beginning of something new in this diocese, the installation of a new bishop. However, I would like to begin by thanking Bishop Lynch for his warm welcome and friendship during this time of transition. I have known Bishop Lynch for over 20 years having attended his Installation in this Cathedral on January 26, 1996 with my brother, Fr. Stephen Parkes. At that time, we were both seminarians. Over the years I have come to know Bishop Lynch while I was a priest in the

Diocese of Orlando, and most recently, as a brother bishop here in the Province of Florida. As the people of this diocese know, Bishop Lynch has a very kind, caring, and pastoral heart and presence. Bishop Lynch, on behalf of the faithful, I thank you for your 21 years of leadership as Shepherd of the Diocese of St. Petersburg...

Whenever a new bishop arrives in his diocese, there are no doubt many questions... Who is he? What is he going to do? What is his vision? **And...in my case, how tall is he?!** Let me at least begin to answer some of these questions. First, I am 6'8" tall, and yes, I did play basketball when I was younger, and yes, I am the tallest bishop in the United States! I'm a later vocation to the priesthood having worked in the banking industry in Tampa in the late 80's and early 90's. I didn't enter seminary until I was 29, and I was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Orlando at age 35. I was called, formed, and ordained a priest during the pontificate of St. John Paul II. I was appointed a bishop by Pope Emeritus Benedict the 16th. And, I serve now as a bishop respectfully and obediently under the leadership of our current Holy Father, Pope Francis.

When I received the call from the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Pierre, informing me that Pope Francis, had appointed me Bishop of St. Petersburg, my first reaction was one of surprise since I had only served as Bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee for 4 ½ years. However, I have always trusted in the Lord's will for my life and ministry, and so, it was in that same spirit that I told Archbishop Pierre that I accept this appointment and will do my best to fulfill the Lord's will, and that I'm grateful to Pope Francis for the confidence he has placed in me by entrusting this beautiful

diocese to my care as its Shepherd. Then, after that, my first inclination was **to pray**.

I went to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel that had been set up at the hotel where I was staying in Baltimore for the Fall Meeting of the Bishop's Conference, to be with the Lord. This was the same thing I did almost 5 years ago when I first learned that I had been appointed a bishop. My prayer this time was for those I was being called to serve in my new diocese, St. Petersburg, and a prayer of gratitude for the priests and people of the Diocese of Pensacola- Tallahassee whom I love very much. I also asked the Lord for his help that I might be the Bishop, the Shepherd, which he has called me to be. I firmly believe that the Lord never calls any of us to do something unless he gives us the grace and the ability to fulfill his will for the glory of **His Name**.

With respect to my vision for the diocese...I'll take time to come to know the priests, deacons, religious, and faithful of our diocese. And, I will listen to you. From you, I would like to learn about our diocese – about the history, diversity, the many wonderful ministries which exist, and the opportunities which lie before us. It is only then, that together, we can set forth a vision of where we would like to go as a diocese.

There are, however, some things that will never change. For example, our care for the poor and marginalized, our defense of human life at all its stages, protecting and promoting religious freedom and the dignity of marriage, Catholic Education and formation, and our faithfulness to the teachings of our faith. And sharing the joy of our faith with others...in other words, to be missionary disciples.

In today's gospel reading, John and two of his disciples were watching Jesus as he walked by. After John declares, "Behold, the Lamb of God", the two disciples begin to follow Jesus. Jesus asks them a simple question, "What are you looking for?" and he invites them to come and to spend time with him. This question, "What are you looking for?" is one that can be asked of many in our world today. For there are many who are searching for happiness, for hope, for peace, and for meaning in their lives. Our call and our mission as believers, is to spread the good news that what they're seeking can most perfectly be found in a relationship with Jesus Christ. We are called and commissioned through our baptism to be evangelizers.

But, what does it mean to be an evangelizing and missionary Church? This is a theme which was reflected upon by Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), The Joy of the Gospel. First and foremost, an evangelizing Church is one that goes forth, as I said, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. This commission was given to us by the Lord himself when he said, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Mt 28:18-20)

It seems clear that Jesus has commissioned all the baptized to be "missionaries" who go forth. When we think of missionaries, we often think only of those who travel to other countries to engage in ministry and to teach those who may never have heard of Jesus Christ. However, we need to adopt a new way of thinking about being a missionary disciple.

Each time that we exit the doors of the Church after Mass we enter into “mission territory”. We are missionaries and evangelizers to our family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, those who have left the practice of the Catholic faith and those with no faith, and finally, those we encounter in our daily lives. Pope Francis affirms this in *Evangelii Gaudium* by stating, “The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded.” (EG 23) One who embraces the call to be a missionary in our local community today will on occasion experience challenges and rejection, but will also experience missionary joy which is born of the Gospel. Pope Francis states, “This joy is a sign that the Gospel has been proclaimed and is bearing fruit.” (EG 21)

Being a missionary disciple and church today often requires that we come out of our “comfort zone”. In overcoming our fears about evangelizing, we find confidence in knowing we are not alone, and as the Lord said, “I am with you always until the end of the age.” Therefore, as we engage in missionary work, it is most important that we stay close to the Lord – in prayer and in the celebration of the Sacraments – particularly in the Eucharist. It is through our own personal encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ which enables us to confidently share Him with others.

One of my hopes as your new bishop, is that we in this local Church continue to grow as an “evangelizing community”. As Pope Francis states in *The Joy of the Gospel*, “An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice.” (EG 24)

The “new evangelization” as it is often called, is really not that new. While we certainly need to find new and effective means of spreading the gospel, one of the most effective means remains one person sharing their faith and the difference that Jesus Christ has made in their life, with another person. And then, inviting that person to experience that same joy. One of the disciples of John who chose to follow the Lord was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. After his encounter with the Lord, the gospel tells us that he “found his own brother Simon and told him, ‘We have found the Messiah which is translated as Christ.’ Then he brought him to Jesus.” We are called to do the same. This is our challenge. This is our mission.

As we make this journey together, be assured of my prayers. I look forward to meeting you, and to serving with you and beside you as we strive to bring the Lord’s love, mercy, and compassionate presence to others through our daily lives and ministry. And finally, let us ask for the intercession of Mary, Our Blessed Mother. May her example of trust and faithfulness be our strength, our light, and our guide.

Amen.