

Installation of the Twelfth Bishop of Harrisburg

Homily

Bishop Timothy Senior

Cathedral of Saint Patrick

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

21 June 2023

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Archbishop Pérez, Archbishop Pierre, our Apostolic Nuncio and the representative of Pope Francis with us; Archbishop Chaput; Archbishops, brother bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated religious, seminarians, lay men and women; dear family and friends who have come to Harrisburg to celebrate this occasion and those who join us via live stream; ecumenical and interfaith representatives who have joined us today, as well as elected and other government officials who serve in the Diocese of Harrisburg and throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Welcome and thank you so much for your presence here!

I would be remiss if I did also again thank Bishop Ronald Gainer, the 11th Bishop of Harrisburg. Bishop Gainer and I have known each other for quite a few years. I could never have imagined that I would one day be in this position, but I do say that he has left a wonderful example and a great legacy in his leadership here in the Diocese. Bishop Gainer, you have served the Church so very generously throughout your life as a priest and bishop. As Archbishop Pierre mentioned, you recently marked the fiftieth anniversary of your Ordination to the Priesthood! You have guided this local Church in Harrisburg for over nine years, through some challenging times, with great effectiveness, pastoral charity, wisdom and great love for those entrusted to your care. We are all blessed that you will be continuing to be active in ministry in the Diocese in your retirement. God has more work for you to do among us! Thank you, Bishop Gainer! Ad Multos Annos!

To my brother priests of Harrisburg; as I mentioned in my remarks on the day of the announcement of my appointment, I am fortunate to know some of you already, both from our time together in formation in the Seminary many years ago, and others, ordained in the last ten years, who had me as your Rector at Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary. I have to say that I hope you are as happy about my becoming your bishop as I am! I very much look forward to getting to know ALL of you. You are my principal collaborators in the mission of our Diocese. As priests serving the Church so faithfully, you have been through some difficult times in recent years. It hasn't been easy to be on the front lines as priests during those times. Thank you for

your ministry dear brothers and for giving your lives so generously. I have much to learn from you, and will work hard with you and for you in the mission that is entrusted to us.

Though these have been difficult years for those who serve in the Church, and in some ways for all Catholics, it is imperative that we also call to mind the painful experience of those who are survivors of sexual abuse. I stand ready to do my part in accompanying and assisting survivors, and I want to reaffirm the commitment of the Church in Harrisburg to do all that we can to provide care and support for survivors of sexual abuse by clergy, to ensure that the policies and procedures that are in place to protect children and to work with law enforcement to respond to allegations of sexual abuse, will *remain* in force, and will continue to be reviewed and strengthened as needed.

Our Church is also blessed with the ministry of our permanent deacons, consecrated religious women and men, and so many lay faithful who are dedicated to the Church's mission. While I still have so much to learn about my new home and new Church community, I already know that we are blessed in so many ways and I am blessed to be among you.

While many in our Diocese have responded generously to the call of God in their lives, I ask you to join me in a renewed commitment to prayer for vocations in all forms in the Church, but especially at this time for vocations to the Priesthood. Please encourage young men whom you may believe could have a vocation to the Priesthood *to think about it – to be open to it*. If you know such a young man, tell him why you think God might be calling him. Your encouragement can make a great difference in a young man's discernment of a call. Today, the Church observes the Memorial of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, the young Jesuit seminarian from the 16th century, who is the patron of youth and young people. It is with this in mind that, even as we continue to pray for our seminarians who are already in formation for the Priesthood, I asked that a prayer for vocations be on the holy card to mark this occasion, and to serve as a reminder to all of us to keep this intention in our prayers. As Jesus said to His disciples: "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest." (Matthew 9, 37-38).

También quiero extender un saludo especial a la creciente comunidad hispana de la Diócesis. Como tantos otros de diversas culturas que son parte de nuestra diócesis, ustedes aportan mucho a nuestra Iglesia local. ¡Nuestra diversidad cultural es una gran bendición! Espero conocerlos, apoyarlos y alentarlos en la vida de fe.

¡Pero, por favor, tengan paciencia conmigo cuando hable en español! ¡Muchas gracias!

As I begin my service as bishop in Harrisburg, my primary desire is to be a good pastor; to be a leader who is *servant* first and so to announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ with integrity and fidelity. I will endeavor each day to give myself completely to this service. Please do not hesitate

to let me know when I fall short of that goal. So, I ask you again to pray for me, that I may be the bishop that the Church in Harrisburg needs me to be.

I hear the words of Saint Paul to my patron, Timothy, in the second reading today very personally in my heart. Paul was writing to Timothy and encouraging him in his leadership of the Church in Ephesus; “for this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands....do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord...(and) bear your share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God.” In the Gospel for this Mass, we heard again the names of the twelve Apostles, who were given authority and sent on mission by Jesus. Like them, a bishop is given authority and sent to serve the Church entrusted to his care. Archbishop Pierre reminded me of this mission when he informed me that Pope Francis had appointed me Bishop of Harrisburg. He said quite simply: “you are being sent!” The mission is to proclaim Jesus Christ – the timeless power of His Gospel, and the amazing and transforming love and mercy that flows from His death and resurrection. The model for this ministry is Jesus Himself, who, as the Son of God, the Word made flesh, fulfills the promise God made through the Prophet Ezekiel, and heard in our first reading: “I myself will look after and tend my sheep. As a shepherd tends his flock when he finds himself among his scattered sheep, so will I tend my sheep. I will rescue them out from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark.... In good pastures will I pasture them...The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal.”

My brothers and sisters, while a bishop, together with his priests and deacons, has a unique role in this ministry, the responsibly for the proclamation of the Gospel – the *Joy of the Gospel* as Pope Francis reminds us so often – is shared by all the Baptized. We are all called by God to make the presence of Jesus evident through our lives, in accord with our own vocation. We must not allow the tragic scandals in the Church, or other challenges that we have faced, to impede us in living our faith in Jesus Christ. I already know that so many of you live that faith so vibrantly in this Diocese. We hear Saint Paul to Timothy, “Do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord,” Saint Paul says. But rather, allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us and to “stir into flame the gift of God,” that we have all received in our Baptism and Confirmation. Paul goes on to say *why* he is not ashamed, and is even willing to endure suffering. It is because, as he says, “I know Him in whom I have believed.” Paul is convinced of the power of the Gospel because he knows Jesus Christ. Jesus is the center of His life. His intimate friendship with Jesus sets the direction of His life, and He could not possibly be ashamed of Jesus and the power of the Gospel.

We also are invited to enter ever more deeply into our friendship with Jesus. To come to know and to love Him “in whom we have believed.” In this way, Jesus *will be* recognized and known in us. Jesus, whom we believe lives in us also *works* through us. Jesus, whom we believe is so

present with us in His precious Body and Blood in the Eucharist. He feeds us with Himself, so that we might be ever more configured to His likeness and to be Christians who radiate the Joy of the Gospel to others; especially those who are lost, on the margins, not connected to the Church, who do not know God – let alone know how much they are loved by God, and that even when it is “cloudy and dark” that the loving gaze of the Father is always upon them – longing for them to turn and be embraced in His mercy.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to concelebrate Mass in Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome on Pentecost Sunday several weeks ago, with Pope Francis presiding and preaching. In his homily, the Holy Father said this: “In our world today, there is so much discord, such great division. We are all “connected,” yet find ourselves disconnected from one another, anesthetized by indifference and overwhelmed by solitude.” Recalling the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Pope Francis continued, saying, “hence, the Lord, at the culmination of his Passover from death to life, at the culmination of salvation, pours out upon the created world his good Spirit: The Holy Spirit, who opposes the spirit of division because he is harmony, the Spirit of unity, the bringer of peace. Let us invoke the Spirit daily upon our whole world, upon our lives and upon any kind of division!”

My sisters and brothers, if we are attentive to the Spirit we can be instruments of the action of the Spirit and, as faithful disciples of Jesus, collaborate in building the “culture of encounter” that Pope Francis envisions for our world. In his Encyclical Letter, *Fratelli Tutti* – “Brother and Sisters All” – written in 2020 while much of the world remained under restrictions resulting from the COVID 19 pandemic, the Holy Father wrote these words: “it is my desire that, in this our time, by acknowledging the dignity of each human person we can contribute to the rebirth of a universal aspiration to fraternity.Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all.”

Friends, it is with this dream of the Holy Father in mind, that I chose the image on the Holy card for this Installation; the image of the stained glass window here in our Cathedral of Saint Patrick, which depicts Saint Patrick, the patron of our Diocese, preaching and engaging the Druid Irish King and Queen prior to their conversion to Christianity. At great personal cost, and with tremendous humility and an openness to forgiveness, Saint Patrick engaged those who not only disagreed with him, but actually had persecuted him. This window provides an image for how we, Catholics of the Church in Harrisburg, gathered as we are in the shadow of the Capital building of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, need to be looking *outward*, and to engage the culture with a desire to encounter others, to listen, to discern and to act, always guided by the Holy Spirit, and the positive and redemptive message of the Gospel.

The dream of Pope Francis has found a practical expression in his encouraging the development of “synodality” as the normative manner in which the Church is to function. We need to be open to how the Spirit will speak to us through one another in our encounters, that together, having *listened*, we might then *discern* what the Spirit is calling us to do, and so then *act* accordingly. This is a challenge to each of us to live our faith more actively; to be Christians in whom Jesus is recognized.

My brothers and sisters of the Church in Harrisburg, on this day that I have assumed the responsibility of being your bishop, I invite you to please join me in the work of renewing and strengthening our faith; in opening our hearts anew to the power of the Holy Spirit, who will stir into flame the gift of God that we have received and in centering our lives on our relationship with Jesus Christ. To paraphrase the words of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin many years ago, when the day comes when *my* name falls from mention in the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, may we all have come ever more fully to “know *Him* in whom we have believed.”