



Homily of Mass of Installation
July 22, 2009
St. Cecilia Cathedral
Most Reverend George J. Lucas

St. Paul tells us very clearly that there will be different spiritual gifts – different charisms – in the church. Each true gift is a manifestation of the one Holy Spirit; they are ordered in their diversity to serve the one Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God that these God-given gifts are so evident as we gather for this sacred liturgy. We are the proof that St. Paul is right about the nature of the Church.

We are so grateful to be able to welcome the personal representative of our Holy Father Pope Benedict, Archbishop Pietro Sambi, the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States. Archbishop Sambi, it was evident to me, when I was in Rome recently to receive the *pallium*, just how close Pope Benedict XVI is to the Archdiocese of Omaha. Today, Archbishop, you help make our unity with the apostolic see visible right here. We all thank you for your generous service to the Church in the United States, and especially for being with us today in Omaha.

I express our thanks, too, to Cardinal Francis George of Chicago and Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia. Your support over the years and your presence today

mean a great deal to me and to all of us. I welcome my brother bishops here in such numbers, as well as the current and retired abbots of Mt. Michael Abbey. I am always grateful for your fraternal support. I look forward to the collaboration that I will have with the other bishops here in Nebraska, Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln and Bishop William Dendinger of Grand Island.

We all want to give special recognition to Archbishop Elden Curtiss and to thank him for his 16 years as shepherd and teacher in this vibrant archdiocese. Archbishop Curtiss, I am grateful for your warm welcome, your support and for your pledge to remain active in the years to come. I look forward to your counsel and your help. I know the priests and people of the archdiocese look forward to your continued presence among us as pastor and friend.

It is a thrill for all Catholics to see so many priests here to concelebrate this Mass. It is a particular thrill for me – and a great source of support to see priests with whom I have collaborated in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, priest friends from St. Louis, and former seminary students of mine at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary. As we begin the Year of the Priest, the Lord is giving me as a father, brother and friend to the priests of the Archdiocese of Omaha. And the Lord is giving you to me to be my strong support and closest collaborators in His one priestly ministry. As we begin this new chapter, let us pray for one another that we might grow this year in holiness. This is a grace that I am confident is being offered to us. If we desire it, if we accept it, then we

can count on the Holy Spirit to guide us in the details of our pastoral ministry together that must necessarily be worked out in the days ahead.

Our seminarians are a sign of hope that God's providence is providing for the essential sacramental life of our church for the future. We thank God for you and pray that all who are being called by the Lord to serve as priests will respond with generosity and faith.

So many of our deacons and their wives participated in the evening prayer here last night. Representatives of that vibrant community are here today. We thank God for the charity of Christ that you embody in your ministry and in your marriages. You enrich the Body of Christ in ways seen and unseen.

Men and women in consecrated life, also present in large numbers at evening prayer last night, have enriched the life of the local Church since the time of earliest missionaries. You are a vital part of Catholic life today. I pray every day that our religious congregations might flourish in days to come for the good of the church, for the life of the world.

Most of the seats in the cathedral are filled today with members of the lay faithful. Representatives have come from every parish in the Archdiocese. I had the chance earlier in the liturgy to meet members of the many apostolates and cultures in

which the face of Christ is reflected across the archdiocese. It is also great to see friends from the Diocese of Springfield, from the Archdiocese of St. Louis and from elsewhere. Your prayers carry me along day by day and I will continue to count on your support across the miles.

It is a real blessing to have my family with me as I embark on this new ministry. Thanks to my brothers Jim and John, to my sister Cathy, her husband Mike and my nieces Anna and Katie, for your love and support always. Aunts, uncles and cousins are here, too. My godmother Alice is standing in for our parents who were called to the Lord three years ago. I become more grateful for them all the time and very much count on their prayers.

The riches of the liturgy are being shared with people across the country and beyond thanks to the strong, faith-filled signal of the Eternal Word Television Network and the generosity of local TV and radio stations, including Spirit Catholic Radio here in Nebraska.

Someday soon I will have the chance to acknowledge and thank by name the priests, deacons and lay staff of the Archdiocesan Curia who have planned and brought to fruition these several days of celebration. You can be sure I am saying thanks to God in this Mass for you and for your generous gifts that bring us together in the Lord. My heart overflows with thanks to God, too, for our cathedral staff, for all who offer such

warm hospitality in the name of Christ. I'm just overwhelmed with the gifts of our choir and musicians. You help us long for the heavenly liturgy, as we lift our minds, hearts and voices to God. You bring honor to St. Cecilia herself and to her Lord and our Lord.

Do you need any further evidence that St. Paul is right? All of these different people whom I have mentioned manifest the action of the one Holy Spirit. We are not separate constituencies; we are not partisans. We are members of the Body of Christ. It is the living Lord that is present in this sacred liturgy. Through our various forms of service, Jesus is known in the Archdiocese of Omaha, known in the Church throughout the world. Drinking freely of the one Spirit, we come to offer fitting praise, honor and glory to Our one Father.

This is the same Holy Spirit that enabled Peter to address Jesus as Lord. Just a few days earlier, Peter had denied Jesus 3 times. "I do not know the man," he had protested. Now to the 3-fold question of Jesus, Peter confesses Him as Lord. What had changed since Peter's denial? In a real sense, everything had changed. The Son of God had offered Himself up to death on the cross. But as Peter could clearly see, Jesus was not dead, He was alive. It was the certain knowledge of that truth, the greatest truth mankind can know – Jesus is alive – that enabled Peter to be no longer a boastful, yet cowardly disciple, but now a fearless witness to the risen Christ. The Holy Spirit led Peter to martyrdom rather than back away from proclaiming Jesus as Lord.

I reflected on that witness of Peter in Rome several weeks ago. At the spot of Peter's martyrdom I received the *pallium* from his successor, Pope Benedict XVI. The Vicar of the risen Christ exhorted me to tend God's flock by my own witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Modern transportation and peace in our part of the world made it easy for me to get from Rome to Omaha with the *pallium*. But think of all who have put themselves on the line to witness to our faith since Peter encountered the risen Lord.

We cannot just take for granted that the light of gospel truth would reach us here in this corner of Nebraska in the 21st century. We give thanks for Mary's gift of her life for Christ, for the witness of the apostles, and the generations of martyrs, including our patroness, St. Cecilia. We recall with gratitude the missionaries who braved great hardship to bring others to Christ. We don't forget our own grandparents and parents. They put themselves on the line because they knew that Jesus is alive. They learned as Peter did, not to focus on their weaknesses and fear, but to put all their trust in the power of his risen life. Because of their witness, we know the risen Christ.

You and I will never be able to put ourselves on the line in our time and place – to profess our faith in Jesus – to be witnesses as well as disciples – unless we are sure that He is alive – risen from the dead. We will never be convinced of that truth unless we have a personal encounter with Him, as Peter did. The Holy Spirit makes that personal encounter with the Lord possible right where we live, in the sacraments,

especially in the Eucharist. In our Catholic faith, we not only remember Jesus, we meet him. We are formed into His living Body by the Holy Spirit. If we are really witnesses to Christ, then we look for opportunities to bring others to Him. We will never convince anyone to put faith in the risen Jesus unless we can offer them a personal experience of Him. That becomes possible when we put ourselves on the line for Him – when it is clear to our neighbors that we will not turn away from Jesus, the living truth, no matter what.

None of us would be here today if we were not convinced that Jesus is calling us to be his witnesses. And we see that none of us have to do it alone. We are given to each other that we might strengthen each other in the midst of a culture that is often inhospitable to faith and witness. The devil tempts us to become discouraged, but we lift each other up with the hope given to the baptized.

Since Jesus is alive, no good thing is impossible for us. Will we who know that Jesus is risen allow ourselves to think that chaste marriages are impossible? It is not impossible to witness to the risen Christ in this way. Knowing that Jesus lives, can we give up on feeding the hungry or sheltering the homeless? Will we ever let ourselves think that it is impossible to foster a culture of life, to revere our brothers and sisters in the womb, the sick, the dying? Has it become impossible to teach the beauties of our Catholic faith to our children, including poor children?

Is it impossible to think that gifted young people would put aside their own plans to follow Jesus in the priesthood and the consecrated life? Is it impossible to accept forgiveness, even for grievous sins, as Peter did, from the crucified and risen Christ?

It is difficult now to be witnesses to the risen Christ – as it has been in every age. We are weak and we fall short. However, let us not think for a moment that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead has somehow become a smaller event over the years. Let us not think that the Holy Spirit has gotten tired over so many generations and so many miles, that we might not have a full portion of the Spirit in Northeast Nebraska in 2009.

Jesus has asked Peter to care for the flock. Pope Benedict repeated this exhortation recently to me and 33 other new archbishops from around the world. The responsibility of shepherding the flock of Christ belongs in a particular way to bishops. But you will soon be reminded of what you already know – I can't do it by myself. We all share, each in our own way, in extending the care of the Good Shepherd to a fragmented world. Let us commit ourselves to think, pray, work and worship together – with all of our attention on the risen Christ. Then our every sacrifice will be so fruitful, and our witness will be so clear, that no one in Northeast Nebraska will ever wonder whom we love and serve.

As we begin this new chapter of Catholic life together, we ask for the intercession of Mary, who leads the procession of witnesses to the risen Christ. More than anything else, we want to be part of that procession, glorifying our heavenly Father, in and through the risen Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit.