

**Homily – Eucharistic Liturgy for the Installation
Memorial of Joachim and Anne
Holy Spirit Church
Saginaw, Michigan
July 26, 2019**

**Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Saginaw**

Before anything else, I just want to say that I am not only delighted, but grateful to be your bishop. What a blessing for me!

Archbishop Pierre, Archbishop Vigneron, Archbishop Hebda, brother bishops, priests and deacons; religious sisters, beloved seminarians, religious leaders of other faith denominations, members of my family; my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

As I begin my words today, as your new bishop, I first want to welcome all of our out of town guests to the Diocese of Saginaw and all of you to Holy Spirit Church for this significant moment in this local church. And I thank you for your presence here today as I become the 7th bishop of the Diocese of Saginaw. How grateful I am!

As one can imagine, at least for us who are bishops, a call from the Nuncio can be very startling to say the least. For me, it means that either you are in trouble or you are being reassigned – which means you are still in trouble! As I said last night, my first response when I look at the caller id on my cell phone was “Oh no!” I even thought about not calling him back right away because at that moment I didn’t want to know where I was being reassigned. All I could think of was that I didn’t want to leave the Diocese of Rapid City – a wonderful home for me the past eight years where I had found so much joy and life from the wonderful faith-filled people there. But as we all know, our ways are not God’s ways.

I appreciate the truth of this reality. If it were only our ways and not God’s ways, most often we would then miss out on the many graces and blessings awaiting us. I feel blessed today. This is another very humbling moment in my life and ministry, but one filled with deep gratitude, immense joy and unwavering confidence that the Risen Jesus who has guided my pilgrimage will remain beside me as I begin my service to the people of God in the Diocese of Saginaw as a fellow Catholic, a friend, and a pastor.

I don't have time to share my life's journey. That will be shared in time as I begin my ministry with all of you. Some of it has already been revealed recently in the local media. But going from flying airplanes for a living to being ordained a priest at the age of 39 and then a bishop at the age of 56, among all the many complexities of my life - this still utterly amazes me. It is a story of love and redemption, a story of God's love – and that story continues today as I become your bishop. This is something that I could have never imagined. But God's ways are not our ways – thankfully.

I would suspect that Sts. Joachim and Anne would perhaps say the same thing about their lives. In celebrating the memorial of Sts. Joachim and Anne today, perhaps these parents of Mary also would have never imagined that their daughter would become the Mother of God. Who could imagine this?

In the Gospels, Matthew and Luke provide a genealogy of Jesus, tracing his ancestry to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of great promises. Not only is his mother's family neglected in that genealogy, but we also know nothing factual about Joachim and Anne except that they existed. What little we do know comes from Catholic legend and the Gospel of James, which is an apocryphal writing from the second century, and the veneration of these saints in the Eastern Church dating from the 7th century. The legend told in this Gospel of James reveals that after years of childlessness, an angel appeared to tell Anne and Joachim that they would have a child. Anne promised to dedicate this child to God (much the way that Samuel was dedicated by his mother Hannah found in First Book of Kings).

But we do come to know Anne and Joachim from the lived life of Mary. They must have set the example that Mary followed to become the loving, gentle, faith-filled, courageous woman she was—the perfect woman to bear and raise the Son of God. It was these parents who nurtured Mary, taught her, brought her up to be a worthy Mother of God. Their teaching and example led Mary to respond to God's request with faith, saying, *“Let it be done to me as you will.”*¹ It was their faith that laid the foundation of courage and strength that allowed Mary to stand by the cross as her son was crucified and still hold fast in faith and trust.

¹ Luke 1:38

But most importantly, it is He, Jesus, their grandson, in his profound humanity, who shines as a light in the darkness for all those who hunger and thirst for holiness and healing, for justice and peace. It is he who is our life, our salvation, the one for whom we must long and desire. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.²

If we really think about it, we are here today for this moment in the history of this diocese because of Him. I am not sure we think about that. We are here today for this moment in the history of this diocese because of what He has done for us. We are here today for this moment in the history of this diocese because of what He calls us to do for him.

The mission statement of this diocese tells us: **Trusting in the Holy Spirit and nourished by the Eucharist, we the faithful of the Diocese of Saginaw are companions on the journey to share the love of Jesus Christ.**³ Friends, this is our identity, the identity of each and every one of us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus said to his disciples: "*Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear.*"⁴ This is the privilege of being a disciple. How many of us really look upon discipleship as a privilege? But it is! Being a disciple of Jesus is a privilege, something not to be taken for granted.

Disciples see things differently. A disciple sees and hears through the lens of faith, through the lens of hope, through the lens of love – Christ's love. In the line prior to this Gospel passage, we find Jesus criticizing the people who refused to listen to him. In fact he said, "*Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes...*"⁵

As people of faith we must move through this world, through our culture, with our eyes, our ears open, seeing and listening through faith so that we can see the poor among us, and hear their cries, knowing that it is Jesus.

There is a beautiful story about an Italian nun who at the age of 60 left the Congregation where she was General Counselor to become a nun in the Missionaries of Charity. Mother Teresa of Calcutta welcomed her with great maternal concern. She advised her to go to Calcutta when the weather would have been less harsh.

² John 14:16

³ Mission Statement of the Diocese of Saginaw

⁴ Matthew 13:16

⁵ Matthew 13:15

After a month of getting accustomed to this life as a Sister of Charity, she sent the “new” sister to work in the House of the dying.

In this House of Mercy, there are many small rooms where the dying are assisted with love. On the walls of every room there is written a phrase from the Gospel. The Italian nun started to wash the wounds of an ill person while looking at the wall where it was written: “This is my body”. At the end of her day, the nun returned to the convent for dinner. Mother Teresa asked her, “What did you do this afternoon?” The nun answered, “I’ve been with Jesus for three hours.”

Jesus says, “*Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear.*”⁶ Yes, a life in Jesus, a life seeking Jesus, allows us to see as he sees, to hear as he hears, and to love as he loves. This is the privilege of discipleship.

Since arriving, I have been asked on numerous occasions, “What is your Vision as you come to the Diocese of Saginaw?” There are many ways to answer this question. Specifically, I am not yet sure what is the vision for this diocese. I just arrived. But foundationally, any vision is to help create an environment whereby it becomes natural for all of us, each in our own way, to “share the love of Jesus Christ.”⁷ This is the privilege of discipleship – to share the love of Jesus Christ.

We can view the world in a natural way or in a supernatural way. Faith, hope and love, the theological virtues of our Catholic faith, enable us to view the world supernaturally and spiritually. The natural way of seeing things is very limiting because the natural universe is limited, is passing and it is very temporary. The supernatural world seen through faith, hope and love is unlimited, coming to fulfillment and lasting forever.

This is what I would like to refer to as the New Advent. Friends, as I think about being sent here, my heart is seeing this time, this moment in the history of this diocese, as a New Advent for all of us, even though it begins in July instead of December. Advent is a time of hopeful expectation. This moment in the history of this diocese for me brings with it a springtime of hopeful expectation. I believe this is what the Lord’s wants for us as the people of God, as the Body of Christ.

⁶ Matthew 13:16

⁷ From the Mission Statement of the Diocese of Saginaw

Such was the life of Joachim and Anne. They were rooted in faith; they trusted in the promise for which the Jewish people had put their hope, and they experienced the fulfillment of that promise through their daughter and ultimately through their grandson.

Without such faith and hope and trust, we may hear but will not understand; we may look intently but will never see. We will never see the springtime in front of us.

The Church of today faces many challenges. This Diocese faces many challenges. You have suffered the loss of your previous shepherd, Bishop Sistone. As we gather today, we are mindful of him and we pray for him.

We also know that the sex abuse scandal has affected every diocese in the country, and many other countries around the world. It has pierced the very heart of the Church. This diocese has had to face this hard reality. We face many other challenges as well. But, friends, these challenges do not define us.

All challenges, all concerns, all problems, all disappointment, all disunity, all fears, through the lens of faith, hope and love – these all lead us to Jesus. He is the answer to all of life’s problems.

We need only to listen to him; to renew our relationship with him daily. In the words of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, “*The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms.*”⁸ This too, is the privilege of discipleship.

My friends, in this New Advent for the Diocese of Saginaw, in this time of hopeful expectation, in this new springtime, like the parents of Mary, the grandparents of Jesus, may we together as the Body of Christ fully embrace the privilege we have been given. Amen?

I could go on and on, but as Jesus said to his disciples, I too, “have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now.”

But my dear friends, my prayer for you as I kneel before the Father, is this: that “*he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*”⁹

⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel, #3

⁹ Ephesians 3:14-19

And I will continue to pray for you. And I ask a favor of you. Please pray for me so that I can be the bishop for you that Jesus calls me to be.

May God bless our Diocese of Saginaw! Amen.

Sts. Joachim and Anne, pray for us! Our Lady of the Assumption, pray for us!