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y dear friends,

During the months of July and August I visited twenty of our parishes that were receiving new pastors, to celebrate Mass and celebrate a ritual called the "Installation of a New Pastor." It is a simple ritual that calls for the bishop to formally present a newly appointed pastor to a parish and invites the congregation to formally welcome him. After the simple welcome and the homily the new pastor is invited to lead the people in the Nicene Creed which we pray each Sunday but with this addition:

"With firm faith I also believe everything contained in God's word, written or handed down in tradition and proposed by the Church, whether by way of solemn judgment or through the ordinary and universal magisterium, as divinely revealed and calling for faith.

I also firmly accept and hold each and every thing that is proposed definitively by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals.

Moreover, I adhere with religious submission of will and intellect to the teachings which either the Roman Pontiff or the college of bishops enunciate when they exercise the authentic magisterium, even if they proclaim those teachings by an act that is not definitive."

Following that profession of Faith the new pastor is asked to take an oath of fidelity on assuming the office of pastor of the particular parish. The formula that is used and signed by the pastor and witnessed by the bishop is as follows.

"I shall carry out with the greatest care and fidelity the duties incumbent on me toward both the universal Church and the particular church in which, according to the provisions of the law, I have been called to exercise my service.

In fulfilling the charge entrusted to me in the name of the Church, I shall hold fast to the deposit of faith in its entirety, I shall faithfully hand it on and explain it, and I shall avoid any teachings opposed to that faith.

I shall follow and foster the common discipline of the whole Church and I shall observe all ecclesiastical laws, especially those which are contained in the Code of Canon Law.

In Christian obedience I shall unite myself with what is declared by the bishops as authentic doctors and teachers of the faith or established by them as those responsible for the governance of the Church; I shall also faithfully assist the diocesan bishops, in order that the apostolic activity exercised in the name and by mandate of the Church may be carried out in the communion of the same Church."

This ritual provides us all in the church with the opportunity to reflect on who we are as God's people and what we are about, namely the work of the Lord and His Church. We are all called to be disciples, sent out by the Lord to bring good news. We have different roles and responsibilities but we are all disciples, called as ordinary men and women to do the extraordinary work of the Lord.

For all of us it is also a reminder that we are part of a church, a communion of believers that is bigger than ourselves and our local parish. It reminds us as priests that we are not "independent contractors" accountable to no one

but are part of a body of priests, in accord with ancient tradition, united with the bishop to provide leadership and direction in collaboration with all our people. Bishops in turn together with the body of bishops under the Holy Father are called as successors of the apostles to the proclamation of the "Deposit of Faith." A proclamation that is life-giving and hope-filled.

For the parish this simple ritual is a reminder that they are not a congregational church or an independent church but part of a universal church that is truly Catholic and apostolic in its origins. That unity comes about through the bishop and the diocese. It is a reminder of our common call to discipleship. We are all called.

With our day to day business we can sometimes lose sight of who we are as God's people. It is sometimes helpful to reflect on God's call to us through the rituals we celebrate.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,
Bishop Walter A. Hurley



Photo courtesy of Carla Foster

>> Newly appointed pastor of St. Patrick Parish, Parnell, Rev. Mark E. Peacock signing the Oath of Office and Profession of Faith during a Mass of installation with Bishop Hurley on July 25.