



Fr. Tom Kunnel C.O.'s Thanksgiving Address

We just witnessed a moving ceremony during this Eucharistic celebration of the installation of the Pastor. I want to pause and reflect for a moment and know that this is not about me, it is about us, us altogether beginning a pilgrimage. The faith communities of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Tappan and St. John the Baptist, Piermont have begun a journey together carrying with them memories of over 236 years of discipleship and worship experiences. We thank God for the past, hard beginnings, generous people who built these two Churches and the many Pastors who cared for their flock. Among us we have Fr. George Torok and Fr. Francis Conka who were pastors here at OLSH Tappan and Monsignor Emmet Nevin who was associated with this Church for many years.

We thank Cardinal Timothy Dolan for entrusting this merged Parish to the pastoral care of NY Oratory. I thank Monsignor Joe LaMorte for being here for the Installation ceremony on behalf of the Cardinal. I thank our Provost Rev. Fr Vladimir Chripko and my Oratorian Community for putting their trust in me to care for the people of God of this new parish.

The combined Parish council, Trustees and the Financial Committees have been immensely helpful in proposing ways and means to bring about a healthy growth of communion and community. We live through uniquely challenging times. Human as we are there could be possible differences of opinions, perceptions and the unconscious use of "ours" and "yours." I would invite you to look to the early Christian Community of the Acts of the Apostles and St. Paul's missionary Churches for inspiration. When the Christian community was divided due to their loyalty to Church leaders (Paul and Apollos), Paul asks, "**Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? (1 Cor 1:12)**. We must be committed to one person, the person of Jesus.

When there was division due to the ethnic backgrounds (I think we have over 40 ethnic, linguistic traditions in this merged parish), Paul will declare: **There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.(gal 3:28)**. I am certain that together we can become the witness of Church of the Acts: "See how they love one another"

In 2001 I came to the US from Africa for Film Production course at Hallel School of Communications run by Fr George Torok. One of my first Film assignment was to shoot the tombstones of the Sparkill cemetery, lugging a 30-pound tripod and 20 pound camera. Everyday when Fr George reviewed the footage, he would ask the same question: What is your focus? Two weeks ago, as we were sitting at the dinner table and he asked me again "What is your focus? This time it was about my pastoral assignment. May be this is a good time to answer that.

I looked to St. Philip Neri for inspiration: He lived in trying times worse than what we are experiencing. In his steps I will strive to help people to encounter the person of Christ in Word and Sacrament: Word made simple and Sacrament made personal. Like him too, I will take special care to celebrate the Eucharist with fervor and be easily available for Confession.

Finally, I would like to thank Fr Peter Bujdos, May Pang and Kathy Lavery for making all the arrangements. The Music ministry team of Elise Espinosa, William and Chad have done a commendable job. Thank you. My brother priests and you who have joined me here in the Church and many others online, I appreciate your wishes and ask for your continued prayers.

The Gospel of today told us Jesus entered a world of illness and suffering. So, he understands what we are going through—not only because he is divine and knows all things, but because he is human and experienced all things. To him we entrust our pilgrimage, with all its challenges and joys through the intercession of Mary our mother, who has a special place in our hearts. May God bless you and your families.

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