



## *Homily for Installation Mass*

**Archbishop Seán P. O'Malley, OFM Cap.**

**Cathedral of the Holy Cross**

**July 30, 2003**

First of all, I wish to express my gratitude to our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, for the great trust he has placed in me by making me a Bishop nineteen years ago, and now sending me to you as your Archbishop. I wish publicly to express my loyalty and affection to the successor of Saint Peter. We are all pleased that the Holy Father's personal representative, Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, is here with us today. Archbishop, please tell our Holy Father that the Catholics of Boston together with their new Archbishop love him and congratulate him for the 25th anniversary of his Pontificate and we thank him for his magnificent letter on the Rosary. Today in Boston, we too say: "*Mary, Totus tuus.*"

It is a joy to have so many members of the O'Malley Clan here today. I love you all very much and thank you for your unfailing support for my vocation and ministry.

I welcome the Bishops of New England and other distinguished prelates who are joining us for the ceremony. We greet our public officials and representatives from other churches and faith traditions. With special affection we welcome our Jewish brothers and sisters. I recognize so many friends from the Virgin Islands, Fall River, and Palm Beach. It was a privilege and a joy being your bishop and I thank you for all your kindnesses and friendship.

I welcome my fellow Capuchin friars, Archbishop Charles, my Provincial, and all my brothers in Saint Francis whose love and support have always meant so much to me. After 38 years, being a Franciscan brother is still the great joy of my life. I wish that after so long I were doing it better, but God and my community have not given up on me. Although, when I have been bishop in lovely vacation spots, my Provincial used to say, "O'Malley, when will you get a real job?" Brother Paul, does this count?

And finally, I greet all of you who form part of this great Archdiocese of Boston, priests, deacons, religious, and laity. As your Archbishop, I am your Shepherd, as a friar I am your brother, and I have come to serve you, to wash your feet as Jesus says and to repeat the great commandment: Love one another as Christ loves us. It is His love that binds us together. The immensity of that love is measured by the Cross. Saint Francis was not a learned man, but he had the wisdom of simple believers. He used to say that the Cross was his book. In that book we find the world's greatest love story. The story of the Shepherd who laid down His life for us, His flock, His friends.

The patron saint of the Archdiocese is Saint Patrick, a great saint indeed. When he returned to Ireland as a missionary bishop, he was preaching in County Mayo where the O'Malleys hail from. A fierce warrior asked to be baptized and received into the Church. Since there were still no Churches in Ireland, they gathered in a great field. A huge crowd arrived to witness the event. Saint Patrick arrived in his bishop's vestments, his miter and crozier. He stuck his staff in the ground and began to preach a long sermon on the Catholic Faith. The chieftain

to be baptized stood in front of Patrick during the sermon. He grew pale, began to sweat profusely and fainted at the saint's feet. When they rushed over to help him, the people discovered that Saint Patrick had inadvertently stuck his staff through the man's foot. When they were able to revive the wounded warrior, they asked him why he had not said anything when it happened. He replied that he thought it was part of the ceremony. The poor man did not understand much about the Catholic liturgy, but did know that Discipleship means taking up the Cross.

Discipleship means taking up the Cross. Today this ceremony began with a dramatic gesture. At every installation ceremony the new Bishop is presented with a crucifix at the door, so that he can kiss the cross. This is a gesture we all know as Catholics. On Good Friday, in endless lines Catholics around the world draw near the cross to kiss it. We can never allow that to be an empty gesture. When we kiss the cross, we are kissing God's love and mercy that is crucified. We are acknowledging that salvation is not a cheap grace, that we are bought at a great price.

Saint Francis wrote in his last Testament about his conversion. He said that he could not stand to see leprosy; but one day God's grace invaded his heart; and when Francis encountered a leper instead of fleeing to safety, he drew near, embraced the leper and kissed him. On that day Francis truly kissed the cross and his life was changed, because his heart was changed.

Jesus began His public ministry in Nazareth with a liturgy of the word. Even as we saw our lectors draw near the podium this morning to proclaim God's word, so we might imagine Jesus as lector, taking the scroll and reading from the book of Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me and has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free and proclaim a year of grace."

Jesus has come to reveal to us the merciful face of the Father. In a world of suffering and violence, of injustice and pain, the love and mercy of our God is manifest to us in Christ. Jesus could indeed say: "Today these words are fulfilled in your hearing."

When the followers of John the Baptist question our Lord about His identity (Mt. 11) with the question: "Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another?" Jesus replied: "Go tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them." He has come to reveal the Father's love and mercy for all, especially those in pain and in want.

We who are His Church are called to carry out these tasks in today's world. The concept of a preferential love for the poor is not a modern concept. In the Gospels the poor, the sick, the marginalized, are the protagonists, and Jesus defines His mission in terms of being sent to bring glad tidings to such as these. Jesus tells us that he prefers mercy to sacrifice. As God's pilgrim people, we struggle to advance this mission in spite of our shortcomings.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the Holy Father urged Catholics throughout the world to ask forgiveness for our sins and failings that have obscured the Church's mission and compromised our efforts to announce the Good News over the centuries.

I dare say, we of the Church in the United States could not have imagined just how important this gesture of asking forgiveness would be for us. Little did we realize the dimensions of the problems that beset us. As Catholics, each time we celebrate Mass we begin by asking forgiveness of our sins. We are sinners and we say that we are sorry. For us Catholics the third millennium has opened with a long penitential rite. And, at the beginning of this installation ceremony, I again ask forgiveness for all the harm done to young people by our clergy, religious or hierarchy.

The whole Catholic community is ashamed and anguished because of the pain and damage inflicted on so many young people and because of our inability and unwillingness to deal with the crime of sexual abuse of minors. To those victims and their families, we beg forgiveness and assure them that the Catholic Church is working to create a safe environment for young people in our Churches, schools and agencies. It must never be business as usual, but rather a firm commitment of every diocese, parish and school to do all we can to avoid the mistakes of the past and create safeguards for the future. Even now, an audit of the compliance of the Charter for the Protection of Children is being done in every diocese. Much has been done, much needs to be done.

Many Catholics feel that it is unfair that national concern on sexual abuse has focused so narrowly on the Catholic Church without a commensurate attempt to address the problem in our contemporary society at large. Yet we can only hope that the bitter medicine we have had to take to remedy our mismanagement of the problem of sexual abuse will prove beneficial to our whole country, making all of us more aware of the dreadful consequences of this crime and more vigilant and effective in eradicating this evil from our midst.

How we ultimately deal with the present crisis in our Church will do much to define us as Catholics of the future. If we do not flee from the cross of pain and humiliation, if we stand firm in who we are and what we stand for, if we work together, hierarchy, priests, religious and laity, to live our faith and fulfill our mission then, we will be a stronger and a holier Church.

This should be of some consolation to those victims who have opened old wounds in their own hearts by coming forward. Your pain will not be in vain if our Church and our nation become a safer place for children. I am pleased that so many victims have come to this installation Mass. The healing of our Church is inexorably bound up with your own healing. You are the wounds on the Body of Christ today. I am sure that many are skeptical and think that the Church leaders are like Simon the Cyrenean who carried the Cross only under duress and not from a genuine desire to help. Perhaps the journey began that way, but what we see in the community of faith is a spirit of repentance and a desire for healing. Despite the understandable anger, protests and litigation, we see you as our brothers and sisters who have been wronged. For this crisis has forced us to focus on what is essential, on Christ, on the saving power of the Cross and our call to follow in His mission to make the loving mercy of our Heavenly Father present in this world.

When our ancestors in the faith built this magnificent temple, they were despised for this religion, their accents, their rough ways. They were the object of ridicule and discrimination, the “Know-nothings” were burning their Churches and convents. They were very familiar with suffering, poverty, and hardship, and rightly named their Cathedral – our Cathedral – for the Lord’s Cross. Today the Church of Boston gathers at the Cross, still stunned from the shame and pain of the Church’s crisis. We come here to ask God to make our suffering redemptive.

We gather here with so many priests, so many good priests, struggling to make sense out of it all. But today I tell you Jesus never promised that nothing would ever go wrong, but yes, He promised to be with us in our darkest hours.

Each of us who are priests will recall that on our ordination day the ordaining Bishop presented us with the paten and chalice and told us: Accept from the holy people of God the gifts to be offered to him. Know what you are doing, and imitate the mysteries you celebrate: model your life on the mystery of the Lord’s Cross.

This must be the program of our life and ministry at the service of God’s holy people, imitating the mysteries we celebrate, imitating Christ’s self-giving, modeling our life on the mystery of the Lord’s Cross. This life of sacrificial love can be lived only if nurtured by fidelity to prayer and a priestly fraternity we build by dying to self and bearing one another’s burdens. Our Catholic people love and support our faithful priests. Never forget that serving Christ and our people is worth suffering for. We are all so grateful to our Catholic laity who have been so supportive of their Church during these times of trouble. To those who have stepped away, I invite you to return to help rebuild our Church and carry on the mission Christ entrusted to us.

In Palm Beach, on the first Sunday of Lent, 500 new Catholics came with their sponsors to the Cathedral of Saint Ignatius Loyola for the Rite of Election, as they were joining the Catholic Church. It necessitated having two sessions to accommodate all the candidates and relatives and fellow parishioners who accompanied them. I was so moved that in the midst of the crisis, these men and women could still see something beautiful in the Catholic Church and that their spiritual lives were being nurtured in communities of faith that were helping them find the path to God. These new Catholics understood that despite the sins and failings of priests and bishops, the crimes of Catholics for 2000 years, Christ is with His Church. Jesus is the Bridegroom not the widow. Christ does not exist separate from His spouse, the Church. As Catholics, we place our faith in Him who died and rose to save us. Jesus came to call sinners and He has called us to do His work. It is humbling. And though we live through a sad chapter of the Church's History, we must recall that it is a chapter not the whole book.

The Catholic Church in the United States has made invaluable contributions to the spiritual and material well being of our country. As Catholics, we have so much to be thankful for, so much to be proud of. As Catholics, we must be proud of the fact that we have educated millions upon millions of Americans in our schools, saving US tax payers many billions of dollars and giving countless children from immigrant and working class families an excellent education. Even today, there are almost three million students in our Catholic schools and colleges; 20% of the hospitals in the country are run by the Church, the largest social service agencies and relief organizations in the land are agencies of the Catholic Church. This is not just a philanthropic enterprise; it is rather an extension of the Christ who opened the book of Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth and said: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me and has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind and relief for the oppressed." The followers of Jesus are also anointed – Christian means anointed – anointed to be part of the same mission that is Christ's – to reveal the face of our loving and merciful Father in heaven.

Once the Archbishop of New York received an intercom call from a new receptionist working in the chancery. She said: "Your Eminence, there is a man in the lobby who says he is Jesus Christ. What should I do?" The Archbishop replied: "Look busy!" Although the Archbishop's words merit a chuckle, on another level they are dead serious. The homeless schizophrenic man off his meds, who says he is Jesus Christ, is Jesus Christ "in a distressing disguise," as Mother Teresa used to say.

Jesus is present to us in the least of our brothers and sisters. He is with us in the hungry, the poor, the Alzheimer's patient, the unborn, and the homeless person with AIDS, all of whom have a claim on our love. He is here where two or three are gathered in His name. Here we recognize Him in the breaking of the Bread and in His Sacraments. We recognize Christ present in His Church. We must not only look busy, we must be busy fulfilling the great command He has given us to carry on His mission.

Even more important than the great education, healthcare and social institutions of the Catholic Church is the mission of the Church to build a community of faith around the Word of God and around the Eucharist. It is in our parishes where we gather around the altar, as Christ's Body the Church fed by Christ's Body, the Eucharist, that we find the strength to lead good lives, generous lives, faithful lives. We know that by carrying the Gospel and the Sacraments in the life of the Incarnation, the Church enjoys a culture transforming power, to help bring about a civilization of love. The work of Christ's Church is the work of salvation: making God's Kingdom more visible here and now and preparing us for eternal life.

In a community of faith, we learn to worship our God, to forgive one another and to serve those around us. We discover the true dignity of each and every person made in the image and likeness of God. No matter how small the unborn, no matter how debilitated, and unproductive the aged and infirm, we must take care of each other. No one is expendable. Each and every person counts in God's sight. The Gospel of Life will always be the centerpiece of the Church's social Gospel.

Where shall we find strength to move ahead, to bring healing and reconciliation, to live out the mission of Jesus to be the face of God's mercy in the world? We shall find that strength in the shadow of the Cross. Today I invite you to renew with me our baptism commitment to take up the Cross each day and follow Jesus.

When I was a young priest at the Centro Católico in Washington, a Salvadoran refugee came to my office weeping. He handed me a letter to read. It was from his wife berating him for having abandoned her and their eight children. He had come to Washington as the wars raged in his country. He came to send money back for his family. After several months, his wife had not received any of the money he had been sending home, and his family was suffering from hunger and want. He told me how he washed dishes in two restaurants, ate the scraps of food from the dirty dishes rather than spend money on food and walked to work rather than spend money on bus fare. He sent all his earnings to his family each week. I asked if he sent checks or money orders. He said: "I put cash in the envelope and drop it in the blue mail box on the corner." I looked out the window and saw that blue mail box – spiffy trash bin, part of the District of Columbia's beautification project. It brought home to me how hard the lot of immigrants is in a strange land. Not knowing the language and customs can cause such a sense of disorientation and alienation.

In the case of the man from El Salvador, his toil was not really futile because it betokened love and selflessness that bound him to his wife and children. But too often people's quest for success in our culture is misguided – to have lots of money, be good looking and thin, and to be popular. It is not enough. If this is the measuring stick for success – the lock box is just another blue trash bin.

In reflecting on the plight of this campesino, I find a parable for our lives. In great part the man's problems resulted from not knowing the language and the ways of this land. For us believers, the language of faith is prayer. Prayer is a language that allows us to communicate with our heavenly Father. It is a window that allows light into our life. Some people have forgotten that language. Without prayer we become spiritually disoriented, our relationships suffer, we begin to be isolated, alone, confused and often overwhelmed.

In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II says that it is a mistake to think that most Christians can get along on a superficial prayer life. Especially in today's world which tests our faith – such persons become mediocre Christians or Christians at risk. Formation in prayer must become the determining point in every pastoral program. In prayer, we shall discover the primacy of grace and discover that without God we can do nothing. In prayer, we will find the courage to go on, to be faithful, to proclaim the Good News that Our Lord is with us. He is Emanuel. In prayer, we will find the strength to carry out the mission entrusted to us, to walk in humility and love and to practice mercy with all. Saint Ignatius put it so well: We must pray as if everything depended on God, and work as if everything depended on us.

If we are a praying people, when we gather at the Eucharist, we will know God's language and be a part of the miracle of self-giving that is the Eucharist. There we will find the strength to make a gift of ourselves to God and to each other. There we shall find the strength to wash one another's feet and to live the great commandment of love.

On Calvary there were but few people, because it takes courage to stand by the Cross. Today we of the Church of Boston stand before the Cross. We are not alone. From the Cross Jesus gave us his mother: "Behold your Mother". We Catholics all have a tender love for Our Lady. With her help we will be faithful disciples and will shall be sure: That those who sow in tears, shall reap rejoicing.

(In the words of Saint Francis we pray) We adore Thee Oh Christ and we bless Thee Because by Thy Holy Cross Thou Hast redeemed the World.