

Solemnity of the Chair of St. Peter the Apostle

February 20, 2022

**Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
of St. Thomas More Catholic Parish**

celebrated at

St. Joseph Catholic Church

116 Theodore Street

Scranton, PA 18508

Matthew 16:13-19

We know that the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter is typically celebrated on the 22nd of February each year; but in order that more of the faithful could observe this celebration, and because it is the title of our Ordinariate here in North America, Bishop Lopes transferred it to the nearest Sunday—today. In this feast we celebrate St. Peter's being made the Rock by Jesus Himself, and we celebrate this office of the papacy that has been instituted as a result. For nearly two thousand years, from the time of St. Peter, the Pope has served the Church as the Vicar of Christ, a sign of our unity in the Faith and the shepherd of souls for all the faithful.

We have a particular tie to the papacy, a closeness to this office, because Pope Benedict XVI was personally responsible for authoring the Apostolic Constitution that brought into being our diocese, the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter. Not only that, but he also personally approved of my ordination to the priesthood and gave the rescript that allowed Bishop John Dougherty to ordain me, even though I am a married man. Indeed, he approved all the rescripts of the men who established our diocese in 2012, which was the fruit of a meeting Pastoral Provision priests had with him and his curial officials in 2007.

Since Pope Francis became Pope in 2013, our closeness to the Chair of St. Peter has continued. He first expanded our ministry in the first year of his papacy, legislating that all baptized Catholics who complete the Sacraments of Initiation at an Ordinariate Parish may become members of that Parish. Before then, it was only former Anglicans and Methodists whom we were permitted to reconcile to Holy Mother Church. Some members of our parish sitting here today are beneficiaries of that change.

Well, a few years after that Pope Francis expanded the scope of our mission once again. He said that any baptized person to whom we extend our ministrations, whether Anglican or not, may become members of our parishes, so opening up the Ordinariate to all former Protestants. His second change makes sense, of course, since the Holy Father is the shepherd of all the baptized, whether they recognize his office or not; so our reconciliation to Holy Mother Church of any baptized person should be possible in every circumstance.

This past week Pope Francis specifically mentioned our ministries a third time. You may have heard about the reorganization of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that came into effect on Monday. Bishop Lopes, who worked in that Congregation for ten years, says from an administrative viewpoint this is a positive development, since it will make the administration more efficient, in giving to the doctrinal and disciplinary halves each their own archbishop, who then answer to the Cardinal prefect. This means that the defense and promotion of the Faith can focus on the work of evangelization, while the

disciplinary part of the office handles the cases of those who have gone astray, imposing just penalties because they are undermining the unity of the faithful.

It was in the context of this reorganization that our work was mentioned. In the recent *motu proprio*, Pope Francis said that all questions about the Ordinariate would remain under the purview of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, specifically the office concerned with doctrine. That is, we will continue to be governed directly by the Holy See, by that office tasked with encouraging "...studies aimed at increasing the understanding and transmission of the faith in the service of evangelization...."

Bishop Lopes wrote to his clergy this past week and told us how pleased he was with the implications of our being mentioned in the latest missive from Pope Francis. Because the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has to do with the promotion of the Faith, our close ties to this office mean that we are an example of how unity of doctrine can be accomplished even with a diversity of expression of the same truth. The study of evangelization doesn't start with us, but our prominent place in this letter means that how we came to be and how we have since prospered must be considered as Holy Mother Church continues to call all the baptized home to the fount from which all Christians sprang.

After Mass we will have a parish meeting, our first in a couple of years, about the future plans we have both for our ministries and our campus. The reality is that we would not have any ministries or a parish campus if not for the office which derives from the Chair of St. Peter. Without the Holy Father's kind solicitude for our souls and the souls of those we hope to reach, our work would be hampered rather than continuously expanded, nurtured, and spotlighted. A good number of you parishioners here have been around long enough to remember the bad old days, when our work was met with suspicion and even sometimes outright and open hostility. It is the office of the papacy that enabled us to go mainstream and experience the growth we've witnessed these past ten years since the Ordinariate was made possible.

We need to prepare for more growth; and while we do, we must live and act in a spirit of gratitude for all that we by God's grace have received through the office of the Papacy thus far. Not least, the ministry of the Chair of St. Peter, after which our Diocese was named for a reason, and through which we may work for the unity for which Jesus prayed.