

July 24, 2023

6:30 p.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

Solemn Vespers on the Eve of the Ordination and Installation of

Most Rev. Edward M. Lohse as the Fifth Bishop of Kalamazoo

(1 Thes. 3:12-13)

Your Eminence, Cardinal-Elect Christophe Pierre, Pope Francis' Personal Representative to the United States, and recently chosen to be elevated in a little more than a month to the Rank of Cardinal, the Holy Father's chief Advisers; to Your Excellency Allen Vigneron, Archbishop of Detroit, and Metropolitan of the Province of Michigan; my brother Bishops from my home State of Pennsylvania, and in particular Bishop Larry Persico, Bishop of Erie, Bishop-Elect Lohse's home Diocese, all my Brother Bishops, both from Region VI of Michigan and Ohio, and various other parts of our Conference; to all my brother priests and deacons, and their wives, from our beloved Diocese of Kalamazoo, from Bishop-Elect Lohse's beloved home Diocese of Erie, and elsewhere; to our esteemed Ecumenical Leaders from various Christian faith communities here in the Kalamazoo area; to the official representatives from our local community institutions and health care facilities; members of Bishop-Elect Lohse's family, friends, and faithful of the Diocese of Erie, as well as all our faithful people from our own Diocese---all of us, sisters and brothers in Christ---Peace be with you!

What a great joy it is for me to welcome all of you here to our Cathedral Church, as well as those who may be with us virtually, to join together in praying the Evening Prayer of the Church. It is a very special joy for me, in particular, to welcome Bishop-Elect Lohse, on this, the Eve of your Ordination and Installation as our Fifth Bishop. In fact, I must admit that I have been very much looking forward to this moment for a very long time---I have literally been "*waiting in joyful hope*" for a little more than 2 ½ years. I want you to know that I have prayed for you every day during that time; not by name, of course, since I didn't know who my Successor would be until our beloved Nuncio called me a little more than two months ago. But my daily prayer during these 2 ½ years was that God's Holy Spirit would inspire Pope Francis to select a Bishop who possesses the gifts, talents and pastoral zeal that this Local Church would need from our new Bishop. And it's very clear from your C.V., and even more clear since coming to know you, that you are the answer to all our prayers. You have been worth the wait. This evening, it's a joy to pray with you, not anonymously, nor from afar, but here in

this Cathedral which, in less than 12 hours, will become your Seat for years and years to come, we pray.

As we celebrate this Solemn Vespers Service, we are joined in prayer with the entire Universal Church throughout the world. But in a more intimate way, we are gathered to pray for this Local Church in these 9 counties of our Diocese, as well as our beloved communities, here in southwest Michigan. Tonight, we---the clergy, religious and lay faithful who are God's Holy People, all of us, members of the Body of Christ, pray for Bishop-Elect Lohse, and for one another.

The Second Vatican Council's Document on the Liturgy reminds us that when we pray the Liturgy of the Hours--- including our Evening Prayer that we are currently praying---we experience *"the Voice of the Bride herself addressed to her Bridegroom."* It goes on: *"It is the very prayer which Christ Himself, together with His Body, addresses to the Father."* (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, # 84) This prayerful exchange is taken from the psalms, canticles and various other parts of God's Holy Word which give prayerful expression to the hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, of God's holy people---all of us!

Tonight, along with our own personal prayerful needs, we pray together in gratitude to God for the gift of our new Shepherd, Bishop-Elect Edward M. Lohse. We also pray in gratitude to the Church of Erie, and to the Lohse Family, for preparing him to assume this new and important role as the Chief Pastor and Teacher of the Church here in this Diocese. He will guide us by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, in our prayer and worship, in our faith formation and evangelizing, in our works of charity, as well as in our efforts to promote unity, to witness to the value of Human Life, and to our ministry of outreach to all God's people here in southwest Michigan. We gather here this evening to pray with, and for, our new Shepherd.

As I mentioned, we are so privileged to have among us Cardinal-Elect Christophe Pierre, our Apostolic Nuncio, who assures us in the name of Pope Francis, that our new Shepherd will lead this Local Church in communion with our Holy Father, and with all Bishops shepherding Dioceses throughout the world, to a personal encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ. I want to thank the Nuncio for reflecting on this very point just 10 days ago in an interview with Our Sunday Visitor, when he made the point that we need to encounter our Lord Jesus, but as he said not *"as an idea, or an ideology; rather, as the Person of Christ, Who always meets us in and through His Church."*

That's Who we encounter here in our time of Prayer this evening; it is the Person of Christ we encounter through the proclamation of God's Holy Word, in the celebration of all the Sacraments, most especially in the Holy Eucharist, and in our outreach to our sisters and brothers in need throughout the world. Jesus Christ is the Face of God; and those we are called to serve in His Holy Name, are the members of Jesus' Body whom we are called to love as Jesus loves us.

All the clergy and Faithful of our Diocese have been praying a Novena for Bishop-Elect Lohse, which concludes today, and a beautiful line from that Novena Prayer makes this point: *"May his (our new Bishop's) example remind us of what it means to be Jesus' Heart of Mercy, Jesus' voice of Hope to the hopeless, and Christ's Hands of Justice (to those who are oppressed)."* In other words, to help people to encounter the Person of Jesus.

A Bishop is called to "teach, lead and sanctify" the Church which is entrusted to his oversight. He is also called to Love His Diocese, even as Christ loves His Bride, the Church. During my more than 14 years here, I have grown in love for this Local Church---the priests and deacons, the religious and all the lay faithful---a love that is truly "spousal". And even as I hand over the three-fold *munera* of teaching, leading and sanctifying this Local Church to my Successor tomorrow, and as he will also be entrusted with the responsibility to love and care for his new Spouse, the Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo, I have no doubt that I will continue to keep growing in my own spousal love for this Church, only now in a new and different way. I have assured Bishop-Elect Lohse of my availability to help if or when I'm needed; I have also assured him that I will happily "stay out of the way" when I'm not.

As St. Paul so beautifully wrote in this evening's brief Reading we just heard from his first Letter to the Thessalonians: *"May the Lord increase you and make you overflow with love for one another and for all."* While that is an exhortation that each of us must heed, I think it's particularly appropriate for our new Bishop. As you may be aware, his Episcopal Motto is: *"Illud Oportet Crescere"*. For those whose Latin is a little rusty, it means: *"He must increase"*. Those words are taken from the beautiful statement that St. John the Baptist made as he was pointing his own disciples toward Jesus, the Lamb of God, when he said: *"He must increase; I must decrease"*.

We must always work to "increase" our love for Jesus, and for His Body, the Church; for all God's People. This Motto will always remind our Bishop, and all of us, to make every effort to encounter our Lord Jesus Christ, not as an "idea" or an

“ideology”, but rather intimately and personally---through our prayer, our Worship, and our service to all those we encounter.

Bishop-Elect Lohse will “teach, lead and sanctify” us as our Shepherd, but he will also continue to “increase his love for Jesus, and for His Church”, his new Bride. Clearly this is not just a one-sided relationship; we are those who make up this local Church---we all are the Beloved Bride of Christ. Therefore, along with praying this evening for Bishop-Elect Lohse that he will be a good and loving Shepherd, we also need to pray for ourselves, so that we will reciprocate that same love, support, and trust in him as he carries out the responsibilities that will be entrusted to him tomorrow.

Among every Bishop’s significant responsibilities includes the mandate to pray for and interact with those who lead other denominations and Faiths, as well as to participate in the life of the civic, health-care, and educational institutions within the broader community, through respectful dialogue and genuine spirit of fellowship. I have valued the interactions with all those in these leadership positions over these years, and I am sure that Bishop-Elect Lohse will continue to build on and strengthen these bonds of cooperation and collaboration in the years to come.

In just a moment, we will join in singing one of the most treasured prayers of the Church, *the Magnificat*, our Blessed Mother’s song of praise and thanksgiving to God. Just as John the Baptist knew that he must decrease so that those who would follow and believe in Jesus would increase, so too our Blessed Mother’s heartfelt praise of God “magnified”---increased-----intensified---her Love for Jesus. May we imitate her. May we also magnify the Lord and rejoice in God our Savior.

And through our Blessed Mother’s intercession of our dear Blessed Mother, may our new Bishop increase his love for Jesus so that he can be a good, loving, courageous and faithful Shepherd for this Flock; and may she intercede with our God for us as well, praying that God will give us the Grace we need to increase our Faith in Jesus, and our Love for one another.

Please allow me to conclude with a prayer adapted (slightly) from St. Augustine, the patron of our Beloved Diocese and this cathedral:

Breathe in us, O Holy Spirit, That our thoughts may all be holy.
Act in us, O Holy Spirit, That our work, too, may be holy.
Draw our hearts, O Holy Spirit, That we may love only what is holy.

***Strengthen us, O Holy Spirit, To defend all that is holy.
Guard us, then, O Holy Spirit, That we always may be holy.***

And Holy Spirit of God, please fill our new Bishop Edward, with your abundant gifts so that he can increase and magnify his love for Jesus and all of us, as he Shepherd's us after the Heart of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Saving Lord. Amen.