



## DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



### HOMILY FOR THE RECEPTION OF THE MEMBERS OF ST. PETER THE ROCK ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL SEPTEMBER 25, 2011

Dear Brother and Sisters in the Lord,

As I was up early this morning, reflecting on the new “Day that the Lord has made” and to “rejoice and be glad in it,” I was struck by the beauty of the sunrise. From the porch of the Cathedral rectory, I could see just beyond the Texas and Pacific Building to the rose hues announcing the sun for the new day. There was also this morning, as the sun rose, light that reflected on the clouds in the sky and around that was both bright and soft. It seemed to me that the Lord was, at the beginning of this new day which is also a new day in your lives, calling us to rejoice in Him and walk in his light today and always.

In the previous days, I was trying to reflect on an image that I thought would bring together all of the aspects of this day of Faith for you, and all of us; and I was led back to my father, who in his earlier years, would often keep a jigsaw puzzle going at home, and work on it, a little at a time. We [the kids] would often try and help him, and I remember the hours and hours trying to put the pieces together to see what would fit. “When would we get this done?” and wondering, at least early on, what the picture was that Dad was working on. Gradually, a little at a time, the pieces would fit together, and I would notice how each piece, when it went into place, would “fit” perfectly the piece next to it, and in fact, hold it into place. These endeavors took a lot of patience, and time and effort, yet I also knew that I was not the one coordinating the work, but it was Dad. When would it be done, I would ask, and what is it going to look like? And, when it was finally done, well, we would step back and see often the colorful picture or work, of that that had been created. Several of these we would save and frame.

I would offer that image to all of you here today, because – not that you are a puzzle – but your profession of Faith and this step you are taking today, are many aspects that ultimately fit together to form the portrait of this journey of Faith that you are on. It is a portrait put together one piece at a time, each

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piece being part of the work of God, each piece supporting the other, just as you each have supported each other and will continue to do so in the days and weeks ahead. And, ultimately it is not us who are putting the pieces together, but the Lord Himself, the same one who in the Gospel of St. John prayed that his disciples might “all be one.”!

What are each of the pieces of the picture that we are looking at today – with your reception into the Church – on this, the “Lord’s Day” that began with such a beautiful sunrise?

The work on this portrait of yours’ began years past, when in the providence of God, someone who loved you led you to the baptismal font to bring you to the life and light of Christ. For many of you here today, this was the baptismal font of the Anglican churches where you grew up and knew the Lord. The portrait of your life began there, at that moment, with the hand of God. . Some of you, who are returning to the Catholic Church, it was the font of baptism in your local parish where you parents worshipped. And some of you, it was a decision you made as an adult. Yet, it was the first step, the foundational part of the picture that we now build on today, without which none of this would be possible today. For that grace and that gift we give thanks. We also give thanks, in God’s providence, for the geographical, spiritual, and ecclesial relationship of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth and the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth. *These certainly are parts* of the portrait that fit together in the hand of God!

As you grew in Faith, *another part of this portrait* which certainly fits together with the above, are the examples of Faith that inspired you as you matured into adulthood, along with the working of the Holy Spirit in those individuals who led you here today to full communion. This truly reflects, I believe what are said to be the words of St. Francis, present in this House of God today [*in one of the windows and in his statue at the back of the Church*], “Preach the Gospel, and if necessary use words.” Fitting, I believe, because for many years early on in the last century, it was the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement and the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement, who in England and this country, worked and prayed for Christian Unity.

*Another part* to complete the portrait of this day is the reality of the Communion of Saints, both here and in eternity: those who have been praying for you today, and among those who, as in the Book of

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Revelation sing the praises of the Lamb of God, are those who surround us today in St. Patrick's Cathedral. Each of those, because you are here at the Chair of the Diocese, in union with the Chair of Peter, have something to teach you and have been praying for you before the throne of God: Whether it be St. Francis or St. Clare, St. Margaret Mary, or St. Pius X who began the Liturgical restoration and First Holy Communion, now St. Oliver Plunkett, who died a martyr's death in Ireland, and all the others who seem to come alive in the light of this day, are now part of the hand of God in putting all of this together in your lives. They are part of your story, and your journey of Faith.

In communion with the Church, we have the Sacred Scripture – the Word of God – which is proclaimed today here and at the same time, in the Church throughout the world. And, again, providentially, are readings which speak directly to us here today: the mystery and reality of conversion and change of heart, which does not always happen when we would want it, or in the manner which we would wish, or not immediately – but always in the plan of God; St. Paul to the Philippians today who urges the people of Philippi – and us – to be united in one mind and one heart in Christ, and to encourage one another. This you indeed have been doing and will continue to do, as this work of the Holy Spirit for unity in the Church – “*Anglicanorum Coetibus*” unfolds in front of us, and of which you are a part. These are still another part of this portrait, as it were!

Another part of this day is the mystery of the communion of the Church. *Here the portrait continues to take shape.* It seems to me that this day, and the vision of *Anglicanorum Coetibus* is a visible expression of unity and communion that all of the dialogue and prayer of recent years have brought us to. For that, especially we thank Pope Benedict XVI, and the foundation laid by his predecessor Blessed John Paul II and the Pastoral Provision, and all who came before. In the words of Father Perkins, who has cared for you these months and who is being received this day: “*We, too, who walk by faith in Christ have entered into God's kingdom. By our baptism we have been made citizens. Within the life of the Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, we are called to be intimately joined with the purpose of Jesus Christ to make known his Kingdom, to live as servants of the King. This joining with Christ is the result of our having repented, turning from our seemingly innate selfishness to live our lives for Him; and we find that this living for and*

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*in Him leads to a profound unity among us. This is the unity into which those being received into the full communion of the Church are being more deeply drawn. It is the unity noted in the first mark of the Church. “We believe in one Church.”*

Can we not say that this day – and what lies ahead – reflects the process of conversion, even in the various and sometimes halting stages and uncertainty through which we must go (as the first brother in today’s Gospel), and also reflects the lived reality of the words of St. Paul today: **“Complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking of one thing...”**. And, that continues to be your call in the days ahead in full communion with the Catholic Church, and thus the See of Peter.

St. Paul continues his letter by saying to look not for one’s own interests, but that of others. Does not that lead us directly to the life of Blessed John Henry Newman, whose life not only laid the foundation for the Oxford Movement and then for this day in history, but as well laid a foundation for pastoral ministry and care for those entrusted to him, as your pastors had for you, and as you and your community now do for one another and those who are leading you. Pope Benedict XVI said *“He lived out his profoundly human vision of priestly ministry in his devoted care for the people of Birmingham during the years that he spent at the Oratory he founded, visiting the sick and the poor, comforting the bereaved, caring for those in prison....What better way to express the joy of this moment that turning to our heavenly Father in heartfelt thanksgiving, praying in the words that Blessed John Henry Newman placed on the lips of the choirs of angels in heaven:*

***“Praise to the Holiest in the height***

***And in the depth by praise;***

***In all his words most wonderful***

***Most sure in all his ways!***

*That may be the last piece of this portrait for the moment, but there is indeed more to come. We can now see the first rendering of this work of divine art, just as the Vann children would get a glimpse of Dad’s*

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completed jigsaw puzzles. But more followed and this certainly is the case here. The next rendering may have a similar theme, but it will be more complete more beautiful, and we will be more in awe..just as we must be today as we are part of the unfolding of the sacred history of the Body of Christ. May we, as history under the providential guidance of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, continues to unfold in front of us, and beckons us to follow, also, as the opening prayer says *“hurry toward the eternal life you promise and come to share the joys of your kingdom.”!*

**AMEN!**

+ Most Reverend Bishop Kevin Vann

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