

## Archbishop Wenski's homily at installation of Father Cletus Omode as pastor of St. Lawrence

**Sunday, September 4, 2022**

Archbishop Thomas Wenski - The Archdiocese of Miami

---

**Archbishop Thomas Wenski preached this homily while celebrating Mass at [St. Lawrence Church](#), North Miami Beach, on Sept. 4, 2022. During the Mass, he installed Father Cletus Omode as pastor of the parish.**

As you may know already, I've come to St. Lawrence today to officially install Father Cletus Omode as your pastor. Now he's been awhile already; but when I assign a priest to head a parish for the first time, I name him "administrator," then, after a while, if he doesn't mess up too much, I give him the more official title "pastor." It basically means, you get to keep him for a while. He has the same responsibilities, the same obligations, and the same salary. (And, of course, today I've come with reinforcements, besides our local priests, we have Father Mariusz Koch, spiritual director for seminary in New Jersey, and Bishop [Peter] Baldacchino from Las Cruces, New Mexico.)

When I hear this Gospel reading for today's Mass, which has Jesus on his way to Jerusalem — where he will die on a cross — I am reminded of a Protestant pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who lived in Nazi Germany — and was executed by Hitler just a few weeks before the end of the war.

He had written a book called "The Cost of Discipleship" in which he was highly critical of the state of the Church in Germany at the time of the Nazi takeover. He felt that too many Christians came to believe in a false idea of what Christian living was about. The Gospel was no longer seen as demanding because too many came to believe in what he called "cheap grace." Cheap grace, he said, is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal conversion. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ who, while risen, still carries the wounds of his Passion.

Jesus, who is on his way to his crucifixion, is not about having any disciple think that he is just about a "cheap" grace and so Jesus challenges his disciples — and he challenges

us today. And basically, Jesus tells his disciples (and us) the same thing. Jesus did not come to suffer and die for us and to rise from the dead just to make us half-hearted mediocre disciples hesitant to follow him wherever he would lead.

Like Jesus did for his first disciples, Jesus also bids us to follow him. But there is a “cost” to discipleship — for to follow Jesus will take us out of our comfort zones, following Jesus will often be inconvenient because it will require us to give up our priorities, our preferences, in order to conform ourselves to his priorities and his preferences. And to be sure, to hear the same Jesus who tells us to love our enemies tell us that we must hate our parents and families can be a bit jarring to some unfamiliar with Semitic idioms.

To be a disciple of Jesus means that he is to be preferred before all others. To answer Jesus’ call, “Follow me,” is both a gift and a demanding task only possible through conversion of our minds and hearts, a conversion that allows us to embrace the cross and to see the world as Jesus sees it.

If we are to follow Jesus, it must be on his terms — and not on ours. To walk in the company of Jesus means the giving up of self-interest and competing loyalties.

Grace is God’s free gift to us — but it is not cheap; grace is costly — it cost Jesus dearly — his suffering and death on the cross.

We cannot save ourselves; only God can save. But God will not save us against ourselves. Too often, we hear spoken or expressed in so many words certain attitudes that hide a counterfeit version of a cheap grace. It is an attitude that is expressed in the phrase: “God accepts me just as I am.” Certainly, God loves us just as he finds us — he does not love us because we are good — Jesus died for us while we were still his enemies. Yet, because God loves us, we can become good. We should never despair because of the “messiness” of our lives — for Jesus came to call sinners. He calls us just as we are — but also calls us to conversion; in other words, come as you are but don’t stay the way you were.

Each Mass begins with the acknowledgement of our sinfulness. “I confess to Almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters.” Before approaching the altar to receive holy Communion, we pray: “Lord, I am not worthy but say the word and my soul shall be healed.” In other words, we ask God to forgive our sins — not to bless them.

This a challenge to get our priorities straight. Giving up our priorities and what is comfortable or convenient to us is part of the cost of discipleship. If Jesus says, “follow me,” you don’t answer, “I’m a little bit tied up today, but I can get to you tomorrow.” If

you're a disciple, you go where Jesus goes. It is no longer about you but about him. He doesn't ask us to respond to his call at our "earliest convenience." What kind of disciple will only accompany Jesus when it is convenient to his schedule?

Your pastor, Father Cletus, is to teach you — by word and example — how to be a disciple of Jesus.

Religious leadership is about leading others to Christ. It cannot be reduced to “smiles and styles.” The authority of a pastor is not about leading others to himself but to the Lord. He is not to point to himself but to point always to Christ.

As your pastor, Father Cletus Omode is entrusted with the “care of your souls,” what in Latin is called the “cura animarum.” This care of souls is a three-fold task. First, he must teach you faithfully what the Church believes and teaches. He doesn't speak in his own name but in the name of Christ. Second, he must lead you, like the Good Shepherd, to safe pastures. And third, he must bring you to greater holiness. In the confessional, in the Eucharist, in the anointing at baptism, confirmation and in the care of the sick, Father will strengthen you in the grace that will have you grow in holiness before the Lord.

Father will serve you well. And he will do so not by calling attention to himself but by calling attention to the Lord; he will do so not by seeking his own interests but by putting first God's will and his people's good and well-being; he will do so not by trying to please everyone — for one who tries to do that usually ends up pleasing no one; rather, he will do so by trying to please the Lord in all things.

To paraphrase the great St. Augustine: “With you he is a Christian, a Catholic; for you he is a leader, a pastor of souls.” I ask you to pray for him, to give him your support, your love — and, since I am your archbishop, I ask the same for me — prayers, support, and love.

Father Cletus, love your people with a shepherd's heart and feed them, lead them to Christ and teach them gently — by word and example.