

**Bishop's Remarks  
Solemn Vespers  
Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption  
Saginaw, Michigan  
July 26, 2019**

**Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss  
Bishop-designate of Saginaw**

Good evening everyone! It is great joy and blessing for me to have the support of all of you in joining join me here this evening, and of course tomorrow. Thank you for being here. It means a lot to me. Being the center of attention – well it is not the place in which I am most comfortable. In fact it is a bit overwhelming. But it is the place in which the Lord's wants me to be in this as we celebrate this wonderful event for the Diocese of Saginaw. Your support and prayers are very much a comfort for me. Thank you.

I realize that the people of the Diocese of Saginaw have been praying for a long time for someone to shepherd them, for a new bishop. As you can see, I have won the Michigan lottery...and perhaps the Powerball as well. My friends, I am delighted to become your new Shepherd. While it all seems a bit overwhelming at the moment, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve God, the Church and the people of this diocese. Know that I have been praying for all of you these past two months as well.

When one receives a call from the Nuncio out of the blue, at the most unexpected time, there are many thoughts that go through your mind. The first one is "Oh no!" One doesn't get a call from the Nuncio very often. Since I was not in trouble, what came to mind on that Saturday afternoon on May 4<sup>th</sup> – "My life is about to change."

I even thought about not calling him back right away because at that moment I didn't want to know where I was being reassigned. All I could think of was that I didn't want to leave the Diocese of Rapid City. It had been a wonderful home for me the past eight years. There I had found so much joy and life from the wonderful faith-filled people there, the many great things we as a faith community were able to accomplish together, and not to mention the many new hobbies that I had embraced. I had become a part of the culture in more ways than one. I have become westernized – a cowboy of sorts.

These past eight years in Rapid City have formed me as a person, as a priest and as a bishop. Experience has taught me that every assignment forms and prepares us for

the next one. I am bringing this formation with me as I begin this new assignment shepherding the people of the Diocese of Saginaw. Friends, I look forward to what lies ahead for all of us as we together, according to the mission statement of this diocese, “trust in the Holy Spirit, are nourished by the Eucharist and “journey to share the love of Jesus Christ.”

For any of us, there are many chapters which make up the story of one’s life. As I begin this next chapter of my life, the Lord, in his mysterious wisdom and love, has made the Diocese of Saginaw a part of my journey. This new assignment as your bishop has now become a part of my pilgrimage on earth. And I am deeply grateful.

Let me briefly speak about “pilgrimage” because it really puts this experience into a context for me and in a real sense, pertains to all of us.

Recently I came across a reflection in this month’s Magnificat from Mother Elvira Petrozzi. She is the foundress of the *Comunita Cenacalo*, a place where people with drug and alcohol addiction can come and receive extended treatment, for as long as necessary, while participating in the life of the whole community. Again, what she wrote has put my life and this new assignment into a perspective for me.

*She wrote: “Pilgrimage is a symbol of our life that is sometimes long and sometimes brief. We do not know how long it will last, but it is a journey toward God. We walk toward the Lord because he is the North Star, the point of attraction on our compass which guides our journey. To go on a pilgrimage means to embrace our spiritual poverty because a pilgrim is one who accepts God’s call to be poor in spirit. To have a spirit of poverty means to recognize that we are poor people in need of everything, above all the grace of the Lord that fills our heart.”*

*“Being on pilgrimage also means to recognize our need for each other. When we walk together we need one another’s help. What it means to be pilgrims in the name of the Lord is this: to discover that our brothers and sisters are gifts to us, a richness in our lives. We go [on pilgrimage] because we have a need to find something. We need to find Someone. It is true that we have met him so many times before, but we always feel a greater need to encounter him.”*

I was struck by this when I read it because it brought home to my own heart what this pilgrimage to the Diocese of Saginaw is about for me ... and why the Lord has sent me here to be your shepherd, your bishop ... so that I can experience that Someone – Jesus Christ – among the people of this diocese.

Eight years ago, I had to embrace this spirit of poverty in answering the call to go to Rapid City as part of my journey toward God. And the Lord blessed me with so many graces.

Now I have been called to do that once again as the Diocese of Saginaw becomes a part of my pilgrimage as well – a **new** home on this journey toward God. And because the Lord is so faithful, I very much look forward to the many graces to be received as I begin this pilgrimage with all of you, the people of the Diocese of Saginaw. And I hope and pray that I will be a blessing to all of you. At least that is what my last name – Gruss – means in German, a blessing.

As followers of Jesus Christ, He will teach us to follow and in following we must learn to trust. A pilgrim must face the journey with willingness, openness, and a good sense of humor. “If we choose to trust that God has called us on this journey and He is directing it, we can relax and be open to the lessons He is seeking to teach us. We trust that God will walk the way with us, no matter what happens. He doesn’t promise to make the way easy; He simply says [these five words] – “I will be with you.”<sup>1</sup>

So I look forward to this journey together. Yes, indeed, he will be with us!

When I first came to Saginaw for the public announcement of the Holy Father’s appointment, I didn’t know what to expect. But what I found was a diocese filled with warmth, hospitality, kindness and faith filled people. My encounter with so many of you during those 3 days back in May, your warmth and welcome, did wonders in settling my heart about what Pope Francis was asking of me in leaving everything behind in Rapid City and to come to the “Thumb” in east central Michigan.

It is really great to be here as your new shepherd. I am both humbled and grateful. As I embark upon this new ministry, we ask Mary, Our Lady of the Assumption, to watch over us and lead us ever deeper into the life of her Son Jesus.

Our Lady of the Assumption, pray for us! St. James, pray for us.

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Sontag from a blog for Tekton Ministries: Pope Francis: Pilgrimage is a Way of Life