This is a moment of tremendous joy. It is a privileged moment of faith. The Church in San Francisco, served so long and so faithfully by its Archbishop Joseph, today receives a new pastor. Because it is a moment of faith it is also a consecrated moment. And in the full confidence of the sacred mission given to me by the Church I pledge myself to you in the bond of the Spirit. I belong to you. I am your bishop and pastor. Together we are the Church of San Francisco.

This, then, is preeminently a celebration of the meaning of Church. As the Letter to the Ephesians shows, the Church is the great dream of God. It is the "unfathomable riches of Christ," and the "design which for ages was hidden in God, the Creator of all." (Eph.3:8-9)

It is difficult for us to grasp, but the Scripture teaches us that the Church somehow rounds out and completes Christ. And this is the meaning of God's Word which says, "He has put all things under Christ's feet and has made him, thus exalted, head of the Church, which is his body: the fullness of him who fills the universe in all its parts." (Eph.1:22-23)
The Eucharistic celebration on this memorable morning is a powerful and dramatic manifestation of that sublime vision because the Eucharist "is the summit toward which the whole life and action of the Church is directed and it is the never failing fountain from which all her power flows." (cfr. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Second Vatican Council; n. 10) And because the most perfect manifestation of the reality of the Church is the eucharistic celebration at which the bishop presides in the midst of the faithful surrounded by his priests and deacons.

This helps us to understand that the mystery of the Church, the dream of God, takes concrete shape in time and place, in persons and in sacred offices, in variety and in unity.

And this the Sacred Author explains when he says, "Each of us has received God's favor in the measure in which Christ bestows it...It is he who gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ." (Eph.4:7;11-12)

This means that in this Church of San Francisco the priests and deacons in union with me have received from Christ a special office of service. We are the "apostles, pastors and teachers in roles of service" for you, "to build up the body of Christ."

This is what Jesus taught in the washing of the feet. This profound gesture was a symbol of the ultimate giving of self in redemptive and priestly service. The washing of the feet brings together in one symbol all the priestly words and deeds of Jesus. It is
Good Shepherd setting himself aside for the sake of the flock.

It is the Beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased, "taking the form of a servant" so that as he himself said "the world may know that I love the Father." It is the Lord of the Church "humbling himself" so that "having loved his own who were in the world he (might) give them the uttermost proof of his love." (cfr. Jn. 10:13-14) It is the wordless proclamation that "The Son of Man has come not to be served but to serve others and to give his life for the redemption of many." (Mt. 20:28)

This striking act of Jesus certainly makes its first demand on those who hold or share in the apostolic office in the Church. And yet its challenge reaches out to all and the words of Jesus apply to every member of the Church: "Do you understand what I just did for you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Lord' and fittingly enough, for that is what I am. But if I washed your feet - I who am Teacher and Lord - then you must wash each other's feet. What I did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do." (Jn.12:12-15)

The Church is always under the burden and the anguish of being true to herself. There is no time or combination of circumstances which allows her to compromise or suppress one aspect of her true identity for the sake of another. Yet each time calls for a distinct focus and ours, I believe, calls the Church to focus on the mystery of Christ as servant.

The head of the Church called himself "the servant of all" without ceasing to be "Teacher and Lord". Likewise, the Church
is to serve the world. But she is "not to be conformed to this world which passes away."

She is indeed to reach out with her healing gospel of truth and grace to the alienated, the oppressed and the unbelieving. She is indeed to "cry out unsparingly" and to "lift up (her) voice like a trumpet blast" (Is. 58:1) summoning the conscience of humanity to the demands of justice and human dignity. But never is she to be "conformed to this world." Never is she to use the weapons of hate. For the Church must always walk in the Spirit and must be ever mindful that such things as "hostilities, bickering, jealousy, outbursts of rage, selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions... and the like" are contrary to the Spirit. (Gal. 5:20)

Whatever her course, the Church is called to walk by faith not by sight. And she is not a pilgrim Church if her only goals are in this world. As Scripture says, "We are the most pitiable of all creatures if our hope in Christ Jesus is restricted to this world." (I Cor. 15:19)

Christ said to his Church "Where I am you also shall be." (Jn. 14:3) Where he is in the glory of the Father, he calls the Church to be. And so "we look for a new heavens and a new earth" which will only come when "the former heavens and the former earth (have) passed away and the sea is no longer." We look for "a new Jerusalem, the holy city, coming down out of heaven from God, beautiful as a bride prepared to meet her husband." (Rev. 21)
In this meantime while we wait for the full flowering of our faith, we can never forget the apostolic truth that "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, and works through all, and is in all." (Eph.4:5-6) And our task is to "profess the truth in love and grow to the full maturity of Christ the head." (Eph. 4:15)

This glorious and beautiful dream of God, the Church, is carried in the earthen vessel of our sinful humanity. And for this reason the Apostle urges us to "Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force." (Eph.4:3) Insofar as our loving, forgiving unity is un tarnished, the light of Christ shines resplendent on the countenance of the Church.

These same thoughts inspired the timeless words of Ignatius, the martyr-bishop of Antioch. Writing nearly two thousand years ago, he reminds us, "In the symphony of your concord and love the praises of Jesus Christ are sung...(And) you... form a choir...(so that) by your unity, taking your key note from God, you may with one voice through Jesus Christ sing a hymn of praise to the Father. Thus he will both listen to you and by reason of your good life recognize in you the melody of his Son..." (St. Ignatius of Antioch, to the Ephesians, 4)
For you who are my beloved priests and deacons, devoted religious, and cherished faithful of Christ in the Church of San Francisco, "I pray that (the Father) will bestow on you gifts in keeping with the riches of his glory. May he strengthen you inwardly through the working of his Spirit. May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may love be the root and foundation of your life." (Eph. 3:14-17)

As for me, I acknowledge the goodness of the Lord and with faith in his presence and joy in his service I take up this new ministry as your bishop and pastor. Pray for me that I may be worthy of this sacred trust and ever responsive to the Father's will.

And so, "To him whose power now at work in us can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine - to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus through all generations to come, forever and ever. Amen." (Eph. 3:20-21)