

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
MASS FOR MEMBERS OF THE NEO-CATECHUMENAL WAY
SATURDAY, JULY 4, 2020, 6:00 PM

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to this country, I greet you in his name, expressing His Holiness' spiritual closeness and assuring you of his prayers as you begin your mission. We gather as many Americans celebrate Independence Day, and we pray for this country that it may be a land of liberty, recognizing that true freedom comes from knowing the person of Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel today, we hear the words of Jesus: *Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you.* These words of Jesus are often associated with Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and perhaps now more than ever, the people of this country and each of us need to come to Jesus to be consoled by the love and mercy that flow from His Sacred Heart.

Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. These words were first addressed to the people of Jesus' day. Consider a few characters from the Gospels. In St. John's Gospel, there is the Samaritan woman, who had to draw water at the well, who was tired from her labors but who in fact was actually wearied under the burden of sin; Jesus promised her life-giving waters. Then there were the tax collectors, men like Levi and Zacchaeus, who while financially well-off, had to live under the burden of being hated by their own people. There were also lepers, burdened by illness, like the one who approached Jesus as soon as he descended from the Mount of the Beatitudes. There were many people of Jesus' day who labored under the "yoke" of the Law, which was so strictly interpreted that it became a heavy burden. To all these, Jesus said, "*Come to me. I will refresh you.*" They came. He refreshed them.

Come to me all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. These words speak to us even today. There is much that wearies us and burdens our hearts. Some tire of working all day, but amid the pandemic, more tire from looking for work day after day and from the stress and uncertainty of not being able to provide for their families.

Many are tired of living in fear – fear of the coronavirus; fear of famine and war; fear of racial prejudice; and fear of economic uncertainty. Mothers and fathers worry about their children – about their education; their safety; their practice of the faith. All this worry wearies.

Many are worried whether they will be treated fairly. They are disconcerted by the lack of justice, especially racial justice in society. Daily the division that exists in society, some of which has turned violent, appears on our screens. When the pandemic began, the whole world had the chance to come together to fight against an invisible enemy. Our solidarity has rapidly deteriorated, and we are like those who built the Tower of Babel: confused and unable to communicate with each other.

Of course, there is the burden of illness, especially among the elderly. Those who care for a sick parent, spouse or relative, while not seeing them as burdens, grow tired too. And if it is not physical illness,

there is spiritual illness. The burden of sin is great. Many who confess their sins and receive absolution still feel the tremendous burden of guilt.

It seems that no matter what we do, we cannot find rest. St. Augustine famously wrote: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.” Hence, the Lord’s invitation: *Come to me all you who labor and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

We need to come to Jesus, but we also need to take His yoke. What is that yoke? It is not the heavy burden of the Law; rather, it is Love. Love makes the difficult easy and the burdensome light. You have come to Jesus, and in the Eucharist, He comes to you to strengthen you for your mission. You are going forth on a mission to help people come to know Jesus and in doing so recover or rediscover their freedom.

When he came to the United States in 2008, Pope Benedict XVI said:

Freedom is not only a gift, but also a summons to personal responsibility. Americans know this from experience ... The preservation of freedom calls for the cultivation of virtue, self-discipline, sacrifice for the common good and a sense of responsibility towards the less fortunate. It also demands the courage to engage in civic life and to bring one’s deepest beliefs and values to reasoned public debate. In a word, freedom is ever new. It is a challenge held out to each generation, and it must constantly be won over for the cause of good (cf. Spe Salvi, 24). (POPE BENEDICT XVI, ADDRESS TO PRESIDENT BUSH, 16 APRIL 2008)

The bringing of “one’s deepest beliefs and values” is an obvious reference for Catholics and other Christians to the values of the Gospel, which must be preached to every person. It is no surprise that Pope Francis constantly emphasizes the missionary dimension of the Church.

When he came to the United States, he canonized the Franciscan friar Junipero Serra. The Holy Father’s focus was on the challenge mentioned by Pope Benedict – to bring our faith to bear on life and culture. Catholics have a collective mission of helping others to experience true freedom – freedom that comes from knowing Jesus Christ. The Holy Father said:

Father Serra had a motto which inspired his life and work, not just a saying, but above all a reality which shaped the way he lived: *siempre adelante!* Keep moving forward! For him, this was the way to continue experiencing the joy of the Gospel, to keep his heart from growing numb, from being anesthetized. He kept moving forward, because the Lord was waiting. He kept going, because his brothers and sisters were waiting. He kept going forward to the end of his life. Today, like him, may we be able to say: Forward! Let’s keep moving forward! (POPE FRANCIS, HOMILY, MASS FOR THE CANONIZATION OF JUNIPERO SERRA, 23 SEPTEMBER 2015)

As you go forth on your mission, keep moving forward, proposing Jesus Christ, who invites all men and women to come to him to find a place of true rest in His Sacred Heart!

