

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
IMPOSITION OF THE PALLIUM UPON HIS EMINENCE JOSEPH W. TOBIN, C.Ss.R
SIXTH ARCHBISHOP OF NEWARK
CATHEDRAL BASILICA OF THE SACRED HEART
FEAST OF THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS, SEPTEMBER 14, 2017

Your Eminence(s), Excellencies, Fathers, Religious, Seminarians and Members of the People of God, Distinguished members of the government, Brothers and Sisters,

At the beginning of this Eucharistic celebration, I had the duty and privilege of imposing the pallium upon Cardinal Tobin, the sixth archbishop of this beloved Archdiocese of Newark.

As today we celebrate the Triumph of the Cross of Christ, by whose blood we have been redeemed and reconciled to the Father, we have an opportunity to reflect upon the different meanings of the pallium received by an archbishop. The pallium is a piece of fabric woven with lamb's wool, which Pope Francis blessed and gave to Cardinal Tobin this year on the feast of the Apostles Saints Peter and Paul.

It is simple yet has great meaning. It reminds the Metropolitan Archbishop and the faithful that the particular vocation and mission of every Bishop is none other than to be a Good Shepherd: A Shepherd who places his sheep, whether sick or weak, upon his shoulders, carries him, guides him, cares for him, and leads him to the source of living water.

The pallium, which is consigned only to Archbishops, is a sign of the essential and concrete dimension of being a Good Shepherd in a Metropolitan Church which seeks to promote, maintain and enhance the fraternal and effective communion of the Pastors of the Province among themselves; between the bishops and the faithful; and, of the bishops and the faithful with the Successor of Saint Peter and the whole Church. In brief, this is what the Pallium should say to the Cardinal Archbishop and to the whole People of God.

On this Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, the Scriptural texts help us to think about the task and mission of an Archbishop, the chief shepherd of his flock. The second reading speaks of Jesus' *kenosis*, his self-emptying. *He emptied Himself and took the form of a slave ... becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross.* (Phil 2:6-7) The One who was lifted high on the cross to heal and save us is the one who also said: *"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep."* (John 10:10)

In His Passion, Death and Resurrection, Jesus fulfills His mission as the Redeemer. God comes to save His People, and Jesus saves by giving His life for his sheep, when in obedience, He offered Himself freely and fully as an acceptable sacrifice upon the Cross. This is what it means to be a "Good Shepherd": to give life, to offer one's life in sacrifice for everyone: for you, for me, for every man and woman! *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have life eternal.* (John 3:16)

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and the bishops of the Church should be living reminders that God never abandons His flock. The true Shepherd thinks of his flock, and he gives himself to them, sharing in their life, without any ambition or proposition other than to guide, nourish and protect his flock.

In the Ancient Near East, kings often styled themselves as shepherds of the people, but in a cynical way. The people could be disposed of according to the King's wishes. How different is the Shepherd of our humanity, who became a lamb – led to slaughter – to redeem us! The True Shepherd is willing to give the most precious gift he can: the sacrifice of his own life! It is not raw

power but love that redeems! The world is saved by the Crucified One, not by those with worldly power!

The Good Shepherd desired that His service of love might be carried on until the end of time. Through his own free initiative, he called some men to be with Him, to follow, obey, and love Him – to be Shepherds of His People. After His Resurrection, Jesus appeared to Simon Peter, giving him the task of a shepherd: “*Feed my sheep.*” (cf. John 21:17). This task was made a permanent reality in the choice of the successors of the Apostles, the bishops, who are called by Christ to be, in His image, good shepherds.

The Second Vatican Council says that “*By divine institution the bishops are the successors of the Apostles as shepherds of the Church*” (LG, 20), giving in this way, particular correspondence between the words of Jesus: *I am the Good Shepherd* and his decision to choose some men, who identified themselves with Him, to be effective and efficacious Shepherds in the Church.

Again, the Second Vatican Council states:

“In the bishops, for whom priests are assistants, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme High Priest, is present in the midst of those who believe. ... Through their excellent service He is preaching the word of God to all nations and constantly administering the sacraments of faith to those who believe ... He incorporates new members in His Body by a heavenly regeneration; and finally, by their wisdom and prudence He directs and guides the People of the New Testament in their pilgrimage toward eternal happiness. These pastors, chosen to shepherd the Lord’s flock of the elect, are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” (Lumen Gentium, 21)

Shepherd of the Flock. Minister of Christ. Steward of the Mysteries of God. This is the Bishop, but, in the words of the Council, he is also servant, teacher, priest, head, friend and brother. Your Eminence, I wish to place before your eyes, the marvelous example of Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori, the founder of your Congregation, as he was described by Pope John Paul II thirty years ago:

*“Saint Alphonsus was a **close friend of the people** This feeling for people characterized the whole life of the Saint, as missionary, founder, bishop and writer.*

As missionary, he went in search of “the most abandoned souls of the countryside and the rural villages”, going to the people with the most suitable and effective preaching. ... He spoke to the simple in such a way that everyone could understand.

As founder, he wanted a group which, following his example, would make a radical option in favor of the most-lowly and would always live near to them.

***As bishop ... the greatest circle of his clients was the humble and the simple.** He also prompted social and economic initiatives for his people.*

***As a writer, he focused always and only on what would be of benefit to the people.”** (John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Spiritus Domini*, 1 August 1997)*

Is this not what Pope Francis is calling the whole Church, and especially the bishops, to be – to be a Church that goes forth with missionary joy to the peripheries?!! The bishop must be close to the people, especially the little, the poor, the worker, and the abandoned, demonstrating concretely a preferential option for the poor. He must be a missionary, going to the geographic

and existential peripheries, bringing the merciful love of the Redeemer there, teaching the truth firmly but in love – in a way that everyone can understand and that benefits the people, drawing them to Christ. Finally, the bishop must radiate the warmth of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, staying close not only to his people, but also to his priests, governing the whole diocese with justice, equity and mercy.

While all this applies to the bishop in his relationship to his diocese, the Council also considers the Bishop in his relationship with other Bishops, as a member of an “episcopal college”, all bound together by the common call and mission received from Jesus and who share in the life and concern for all the churches.

From here, the Church can be considered not only as a Diocese, with its own Bishop as head, but also as an Ecclesiastical Province or Archdiocese, with an Archbishop as its leader. The pallium is a reminder and call to communion of all the Shepherds who belong to an Archdiocese or Province. The Shepherd of a Metropolitan Church is a constant force for encouraging effective and affective communion at all levels of the Church.

This idea of ecclesial communion is of fundamental importance for all the faithful, living in union and communion with their own Bishop, and provides a real opportunity to live communion with all the other bishops, with the Pope as the head, and consequently, to live and reinforce the spiritual bond, in love, with the whole Church of Christ present in the world, making concrete the desire of the Lord: *that all may be one!*

The vocation and mission of a Pastor is both challenging and rewarding. At its core, it helps people realize that in the hands of God, everything is different – that living in communion with Jesus Christ is more than something merely human; that the Church is the family of God that lives mercy, magnanimity, love, and communion; that the family of God is permanently sent, called to go forth lifting up, for everyone to see, the joy of the Gospel, and to show the tenderness of the God who is the friend and shepherd of each person, without exception, and who came so that each person may have life and life eternal.

Your Eminence, in the name of the Lord, very consciously and with firm and growing faith, trust, love and *parrhesia*, sustained by the Holy Spirit, joining your hands, will, and heart to those of your brother Bishops of your suffragan dioceses, I exhort you to move forward, offering to the sheep of Christ “*the most effective and authentic witness, which is one that does not contradict by behavior or lifestyle, what is preached with the word and taught to others!*” (Homily of Pope Francis, 29 June 2015)

May Our Lady of Perpetual Help, who accompanies with her maternal love and prayers the steps of the Church, sustain and support your service and pastoral ministry, and obtain for our brothers in the episcopacy, priests, consecrated persons and laity of this Ecclesiastical Province, the renewed grace and strength that will help us to live with courage, in fidelity and joy, our vocations as disciples, missionaries, and apostles, in the journey of faith that leads to the Father’s house! May the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, bless you always and abundantly! Amen.