

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
MASS FOR THE IMPOSITION OF THE PALLIUM UPON
HIS EXCELLENCY NELSON PEREZ
METROPOLITAN ARCHBISHOP OF PHILADELPHIA
CATHEDRAL BASILICA OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL
SUNDAY, JULY 19, 2020

Your 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 Archbishop Nelson Perez, the fourteenth archbishop of this beloved Archdiocese of Philadelphia. It is fitting that this ceremony is held here in this Cathedral Basilica in honor of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, as the pallium signifies communion with the Bishop of Rome.

The pallium is a piece of fabric woven with lamb's wool, which Pope Francis blessed this year on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. It is simple yet has great meaning, as the Holy Father said on the feast: "The pallium is a sign of the unity between the sheep and the Shepherd who, like Jesus, carries the sheep on his shoulders, so as never to be separated from it." (POPE FRANCIS, HOMILY, SOLEMNITY OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL, 29 JUNE 2020)

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 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 Bishops 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.

Last Sunday, Jesus began with the parable of the sower who sows seeds on different types of soil. It was the first of seven parables related to the Kingdom of God. Jesus continues with three more parables this week, including the parable of the weeds and the wheat, to which I will return.

In all these parables, hiddenness recurs as a motif: a fruitful hiddenness rich in the process of maturation: the seed growing deep within the soil in the first three parables; the growth of the mustard seed into a bush; the woman's yeast, working its effect within the dough; and later, the treasure hidden in the field; the pearl, slowly developed within its oyster, and the fish that are dragged out of their lairs, deep within the sea. This long-hidden growth is followed by sudden manifestation in the daylight.

Each of these things lies in an active, latent state, like the caterpillar in its cocoon, waiting to burst forth like a butterfly. But it remains hidden. Its presence and dynamism must be discovered and recognized. The only purpose in their being hidden is their ultimately being found, as it says in Sirach (20:30): "*Hidden wisdom and unseen treasure, what advantage is there in either of them?*"

Your Excellency, the Faith has been in a process of maturation in this Ecclesiastical Province for more than two hundred years. The contributions of the lay faithful, the bishops, priests and religious cannot go unrecognized, and yet in recent years the spiritual and cultural patrimony of the Church in this region has been clouded by shadows, obscured by sin and darkness.

It will be your task as Metropolitan Archbishop to help the Bishops and People of God rediscover the beauty of the Faith, to rejoice anew in finding this hidden treasure. The person who does the discovering must have the desire for the search and the determination to invest all his energy in the endeavor for the sake of great gain in the end (the harvest, the bread, the precious things mentioned in these parables).

Whatever the Kingdom may be, we are to conclude that the Kingdom of God, for a long while, passes unperceived by human eyes; it develops according to its own laws (not ours). The coming to light of the Kingdom coincides with the plan of God for our salvation.

In next Sunday's Gospel, we will hear of the field where the treasure is hidden. Is this the same "field" of the wheat and the weeds? It could be, since these two parables are so closely connected in the Gospel. Fields are not only for growing grain but for hiding valuables - at least they were in the era before banks and safety deposit boxes.

Who has hidden this treasure and why? In all these parables, the chief agent is God. At the foundation of the world, He hid great mysteries that the Incarnate Word would in due time reveal to the people for his salvation and which the people in due time would discover. The whole mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven is contained in this drama of this treasure's hiding and finding.

But, what is the treasure? This is the work carried out by the Father so that we may find, as St. Paul says in Colossians, "*all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mysteries, of Christ, in whom all the treasures of Wisdom and Knowledge are hidden.*"

The treasure is Christ Himself, whom we can discover, encounter, and receive in this "field" that is our world. Christ hid Himself in the Virgin's womb and then manifested Himself. Many failed to seek and find Him. Although He has revealed Himself as Crucified and Risen Lord, still He hides Himself in the Host and abides with us. He is our treasure – our treasure which brings us happiness and eternal life.

Many people say: "I don't get much out of Mass." In fact, we must examine not only what we receive – God's saving Word and the Eucharist – but also our own attitudes; our desire; our sense of searching and discovering Christ. What truly precious treasure remains to be discovered here in Philadelphia and throughout the Province?

Your Excellency, part of your vocation as Metropolitan Archbishop will be to be a Shepherd who leads the flock on the adventure of faith, a faith that attracts, saves, and brings joy. Another part of your vocation, however, will be to discern; to accept responsibility for difficult decisions that must be made; to prune and reform structures for the sake of the mission of evangelization; and to help the Church of Philadelphia and the other dioceses, with their respective bishops, to bear fruit.

Just two years ago, you invited me to deliver a keynote address at the Fifth National Encuentro and to address the characteristics of an evangelizing community, which Pope Francis mentions in

paragraph 24 of his exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*. Interestingly, in that very paragraph, the Holy Father mentions today's parable of the weeds and the wheat, writing:

"An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful. It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient with the weeds. The sower when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or overreact. He or she finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear." (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 24 NOVEMBER 2013, 24)

Fruitfulness demands discernment and patience. The fundamental task is discernment. The parable of the weeds and wheat speaks of distinguishing what is from the Son of Man, who sows good seed – the children of God – in the field from the weeds – the children of the Evil One, sown by the devil. In Greek, the word used for weeds is *zizania*, which specifically refers to ryegrass. *Zizania* looks like wheat as it begins to grow, but only when it is mature can one discern the difference.

Jesus cautions his disciples of the need to be patient and to discern because things are not always initially clear. While farmers discern between wheat and weeds, the Church embraces people, who have the possibility of responding to the Divine Initiative and who, by grace, can be transformed from sinner to saint, from weeds to wheat. Following Jesus' example, we try to be patient. Patience in the art of accompaniment and discernment allows the whole Church to move forward.

Within the Province, recognizing the scandal; the priest shortage; the merging and closure of parishes; and even the soil, which in a secularized culture, appears less receptive to the gift of faith, it would be realistic (and even facile) to say: *"An Enemy has done this."*

But your vocation as Metropolitan Archbishop cannot stop at this declaration. You must guide your Brother Bishops and the whole People of God, along the path of discernment for the sake of the mission, which is the salvation of souls.

While evil and worldliness, even among churchmen, must be uprooted and the Enemy combatted, prudence and patience are necessary in the good fight of faith. The Holy Father sees this patience as a mark of holiness:

*"I see holiness in the patience of the People of God ... I often associate sanctity with patience; not only as *hypomoné*, taking charge of events and circumstances of life, but also as a constancy in going forward, day by day. This is the sanctity of the militant Church also mentioned by St. Ignatius."* (INTERVIEW WITH ANTONIO SPADARO, 21 SEPTEMBER 2013)

Your Excellency, the challenges this Province faces will not be overcome easily but must be faced. The challenges of this year – the coronavirus pandemic; racial injustice; and social unrest – have left the People of God longing for relief, which comes from union with God, that is, from holiness.

This Archdiocese and the surrounding Dioceses need a shepherd in their midst who models the holiness of Christ, the Good Shepherd. You are called to be a Shepherd after the Heart of the Lord, drawing people above the purely material to recognize the Divine Presence in their midst.

The vocation and mission of a Pastor is challenging and rewarding. At its core, it helps people see that in the hands of God, everything is different – that living in communion with Christ is more than

something merely human; that the Church as the family of God lives mercy, love, and communion; that the family of God is called and sent to help others discover the hidden treasure of faith.

Your Excellency, in the name of the Lord, very consciously and with firm and growing faith, trust, love, sustained by the Holy Spirit, joining your hands, will, and heart to those of your brother Bishops of your suffragan dioceses, I exhort you as a Shepherd to proclaim to the flock that the Kingdom of God is at hand!

May the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, St. John Neumann and Saint Katharine Drexel, help you to fulfill the noble vocation to which Christ, the Good Shepherd, has called you. Amen.