

**IMPOSITION OF THE PALLIUM UPON HIS EXCELLENCY BERNARD A. HEBDA
NINTH ARCHBISHOP OF SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS
CATHEDRAL OF SAINT PAUL, SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT, DECEMBER 18, 2016**

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 Bernard Hebda, the ninth archbishop of this beloved Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis.

In these days, so close to the celebration of the Lord's birth, as families and parishes come together in unity, 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 Archbishop Hebda this year on the feast of the Apostles Saints Peter and Paul.

It is simple yet has great and important meaning. It is a reminder to the Metropolitan Archbishop and to all 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, and guides him, cares for him, and leads him to the source of living water. The pallium is consigned only to Archbishops. It 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 Archbishop and to the whole People of God.

On this Fourth Sunday of Advent, the Gospel text from Saint Matthew creates excitement and anticipation for the birth of Jesus, but also helps us to think about the task and mission of an Archbishop, the chief shepherd of his flock. Jesus will be born in a stable, surrounded by His Mother Mary and Joseph, a few animals, including sheep and the poor shepherds, who were the first to see the Messiah. In that moment, they were reminded that *God is with us*, the meaning of the name *Emmanuel*. The newborn child upon whom they gaze and who brought them hope and joy will one day say: *"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep."* The birth of the Child can be re-read through the lens of His Passion, Death and Resurrection. In Jesus, 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!

Jesus is the Good Shepherd and the bishops of the Church should be living reminders that *God is with us*. The true Shepherd thinks of his flock and he gives to them, sharing in their life, without any ambition or proposition other than to guide, nourish and protect his flock. At Christmastime, when so many are buying and exchanging gifts, we should consider the gift of the true Shepherd. He is willing to give the most precious gift he can: the sacrifice of his own life!

Jesus is the one, true Shepherd, but He, desiring that His service and gift of self might be carried on until the end of time, through his own pure and free initiative called some men to be with Him, to follow Him, to obey Him, and to love Him – to be Shepherds of His People.

After His Resurrection, Jesus appeared to Simon Peter, engaging him in a dialogue of love and giving him the task of a shepherd: *"Feed my sheep."* (cf. Jn 21). 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: *"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, or, as some others have called him “the angel of his church.” Again, at Christmas, many trees are adorned with an angel at the top. The Bishop as angel is an image that could surprise us and could even seem strange, but it can certainly help us to understand the vocation and mission of the Bishop in his diocese or archdiocese.

Why do some say he is like an angel? An angel is one who “protects”, who “visits”, who “counsels”, who “points toward heaven.” His function as the ancient prayer of the Guardian Angel says is *to light, to guard, to rule, and to guide* the children of God. These words capture well the task, responsibility and the mission of the bishop, and, without a doubt, they are bound up with the cardinal virtues of *fortitude, justice, prudence, and temperance*.

The bishop, in effect, “*lights*” or enlightens, and this demands that he acts, using the virtue of *fortitude*. His mission is to lead the community as a servant, with the heart of the Good Shepherd, but also as a teacher that always seeks the glory of God and the salvation of men and women. The bishop also *guards*, and here he must act with *justice*. He guards the “Holy Church, the spouse of Christ” and the Body of Christ, of which each and every baptized person is a member. He guards and procures their true good, giving particular attention and care to those members who are weakest in the faith or in their existential reality, not to mention the sheep that are still outside the fold. He *rules* the Church with the virtue of *prudence* that comes from being with his sheep – in front, in the middle, and behind them – offering his example, listening to their voices and prudently discerning, fostering communion, confronting challenges, and contributing to the search for solutions without neglecting the truth, while, at the same time, promoting encounter and honest dialogue, even with civil society. The Bishop *governs*, practicing the virtue of *temperance*, directing and accompanying the life of the Church with a spirit of humility, patience and love; promoting initiatives that contribute to the maturation and vitality of the faith and to the integral formation of all; and being watchful over the forms of pastoral activity and the use of Church goods.

In this way, we look at the bishop in his relationship to his particular church. Nevertheless, as the Council does, we can also consider the Bishop in his relationship with other Bishops, as a member of an “episcopal college”. The Council generally considers the Bishop not only his own, but also within a group of bishops, all bound together by the common call and mission received from Jesus, 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, worn by an archbishop, is then a reminder and call to communion of all the Shepherds who belong to an Archdiocese or Ecclesiastical Province. The Shepherd of a Metropolitan Church is a constant force for encouraging effective, efficacious, and fraternal 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 Diocesan 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 living and concrete, the desire of the Lord: *that all may be one!*

The vocation and mission of a Pastor is without a doubt challenging, but also rewarding. At its foundation, it helps people to 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 of men and women, who seeks them out, who is for each and every man and woman, without exception, so that each person may have life and life eternal.

To Archbishop Hebda, I say: Take courage! 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, 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 the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of the Apostles, who accompanied and accompanies with her maternal love and prayers the steps of the Church, we pray, 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 of our lives, bless you always and abundantly! Amen.