

Companions on the Journey

July 26, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ

(Below is a portion of the homily delivered by the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States last Sunday at the investiture of Archbishop Nelson Perez with the pallium.)

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." 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 (The archdiocese of Philadelphia is the leading diocese in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania and enjoys a leadership role among the other seven dioceses in Pennsylvania.) 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. 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. 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.

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.

Peace,

Monsignor McHenry