

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
HOLY MASS FOR THE FEAST DAY OF THE PARISH OF
ST. CHARLES BORROMEO, RESURRECTION AND ALL SAINTS
HARLEM, NEW YORK – NOVEMBER 3, 2024**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Happy Feast Day! It is a joy to come to this great parish, a center of rich history, and a place where the Holy Spirit has led the persevering work of the Gospel for the last 136 years. As the Holy Father’s representative to this country, I bring to you the spiritual closeness of Pope Francis, as well as the memory of the visit of one of his predecessors 45 years ago, St. John Paul II. John Paul brought to this community a message that is substantially the same as the message that Pope Francis sends you: the joy of the Gospel. It is because of the joy of the Gospel that this parish exists, and it is why we are Catholic Christians. You rejoice because Jesus has come into the world, died on the Cross, and is risen from the dead. You rejoice because you have been baptized into his death and resurrection, and because every time you gather in this church, you experience his presence among you, guiding you in truth and love.

As St. John Paul II said when he was here in 1979, this joy that comes from the Gospel is what gives us hope. And what was true 45 years ago is still true today. As John Paul said at that time, there are people who have never known the joy of the Gospel. In his words, “They feed on emptiness and tread the paths of despair. . . . And we need not look to the far ends of the earth for them. They live in our neighborhoods, they walk down our streets, they may even be members of our own families.” He continued by saying, “We must go to them therefore as messengers of hope. We must bring to them the witness of true joy. We must pledge to them our commitment to work for a just society and city where they feel respected and loved.”¹

My brothers and sisters, as we listen to those words which the Pope spoke here in this church 45 years ago, isn’t it remarkable how similar the message is for

¹ Pope St. John Paul II, Address during his visit to St. Charles Borromeo Parish, 2 October 1979.

today? Circumstances change, one generation gives way to another, and yet the Gospel is just as relevant today as it was then. Christ is alive, he is thirsting for our faith, and he wants to quench our thirst for an abundant life! You, the members of this parish, and the generations of parishioners who have gone before you, together with your pastors, have been living witnesses to the truth and the joy of the Gospel through every kind of change and all sorts of trial. Your community of faith has always emerged from the testing and the storms of life with renewed joy and a commitment to the Kingdom of God that is irrepressible. Praise God for this grace! Praise God for being so present in this place! In this parish, God continues to prove what St. Paul said and what Pope Francis used as the opening words of his new encyclical on the Sacred Heart: *Dilexit Nos*. “He loved us.”² God has shown, and continues to show, his love for this community, for this parish. And as St. Paul also says, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”³

The joy of the Gospel will carry us into the coming Jubilee Year of 2025. The Holy Father announced the Jubilee with these words: *Spes Non Confundit*. “Hope does not disappoint.”⁴ You members of this parish, and the parishioners who came before you: you know that hope does not disappoint. How many events in the history of this church and its surrounding community could have led a person from disappointment to despair. For example: The many instances of racism. The times when poverty threatened to extinguish this local community. The social changes, and even the wars, that had a dramatic impact on the people here. The fire in 1968 which destroyed much of the interior of the church. After every threat, every downturn in the fortunes of the people, this parish came back to the fullness of life in a way that can be described as a kind of “resurrection”. Indeed, the constant renewal of your mission *is* a fruit of Christ’s Resurrection. It is evidence of what we celebrate every time we come together for the Eucharist: Christ is alive in our midst!

The greatest evidence of Christ’s presence is love. When Moses gave God’s people the law, he summed it all up in love.⁵ And when the scribe asked Jesus which

² Cf. *Romans* 8:37; cf. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Dilexit Nos* on the Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ, 24 October 2024, 1.

³ *Romans* 8:31.

⁴ *Romans* 5:5; cf. Pope Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee 2025, 9 May 2024, 1.

⁵ Cf. *Deuteronomy* 6:2-6 (First Reading for the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B).

is the first of the commandments, the Lord quoted Moses: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength,” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”⁶ Brothers and sisters, love is what makes your parish alive. This is a parish with a passionate heart! This is a parish with a fervent soul! This is a parish with a discerning mind! And this is a parish with great strength! And in this parish, God is very pleased to dwell.

When God dwells in your hearts, then your hearts can produce praise and thanksgiving. Sometimes lament too: lament for the suffering and the injustice that still exist in this world, and for the ways in which the Gospel is defamed through a lack of love and a lack of mercy, through people’s arrogance and pride. But if we keep our hearts open to the Lord, then our hearts can be united with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. United with Jesus, our lament has meaning; it has redemptive value. United with Jesus, our praise and thanksgiving become a life-giving sacrifice to the Father. United with Jesus, both our joys and our sorrows, our tears and our laughter, are priestly acts: they are acts of the one High Priest, Jesus Christ, who is always bringing mercy and salvation and redemption into this world.⁷

Having recently celebrated the feast of All Saints, we thank God for the holy examples of women and men who lived this Gospel with heroic love. We give thanks for St. Charles Borromeo and all the saints. We give thanks for the men and women of African American heritage who are depicted in this sanctuary. And we give thanks for the holy men and women who have graced the history of this parish. But not only do we give thanks for them. We eagerly join in the mission that they have handed on to us. A mission of joy. An act of hope. And a labor of love.

May God bless you, and may God continue to bless this parish.

⁶ *Mark* 12:30, 31

⁷ Cf. *Hebrews* 7:23-28 (Second Reading for the 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B).