

DIOCESE OF METUCHEN
PILGRIMAGE TO THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION,
SATURDAY OF THE 33RD WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME
NOVEMBER 19, 2016

Your Excellency, my brothers and sisters in Christ, I am happy to be with you on the occasion of your Diocesan Pilgrimage to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, which providentially coincides with the 35th anniversary of the establishment of the Diocese of Metuchen. As the Holy Father's personal representative in the United States, I want to assure you of his spiritual closeness and his prayers.

When your diocese was established and then-Bishop McCarrick was appointed as the first bishop, he described the events as "a great adventure in grace." Your presence here is a sign that this adventure continues. We give thanks to God for you and for the many graces and blessings he has poured out upon the bishops, priests, religious, and the whole People of God in Metuchen. As your diocese journeys on in faith, it is good to hear once more the words of Cardinal McCarrick at the beginning of its journey:

"This new ship of the Church of Metuchen now casts off its moorings from the safe harbor of the Diocese of Trenton where with loving care it has been made seaworthy and given a secure birth for more than a hundred years. We set out, all of us together, with Christ as our captain. His Gospel as our compass, and His Holy Mother Mary as our guiding star. We do not yet see the shoals that lie ahead of us, nor the squalls that will test the fiber of our sails, but we know that they are out there and that all of us have many leagues to journey on this pilgrim voyage that will one day bring us home.

We give thanks to Our Heavenly Father that Jesus is truly in the boat with us, and that, even more, it is His Hand on the tiller and His Spirit in the gentle breeze that blows us where He will."

Today your voyage continues under the steady hands of Bishop Checchio and you have arrived at this place of pilgrimage, dedicated to Our Lady, the patroness of your diocese. Pope Francis says:

"Pilgrimage is a symbol of life. It makes us think of life as walking, as a path. If a person does not walk, but instead stays still, this is not useful; it accomplishes nothing. Think of water: when water is not in the river, it does not course, but instead it remains still and stagnates. A soul that does not walk in life doing good, doing many things that one must do for society, to assist others, or who does not walk through life seeking God and inspiration from the Holy Spirit, is a soul that finishes in mediocrity and in spiritual poverty. Please do not stand still in life!" (Message to Participants in the 37th Nocturnal Pilgrimage from Macerata to Loreto, 6 June 2015)

Pilgrimage is a symbol of life and an opportunity to encounter the God of Life. When confronted by the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection of the dead, Jesus responds: "*The children of this age marry and remarry; but those deemed worthy to attain to the coming age and to the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. They can no longer die, for they are like the angels; and they are the children of God because they are the ones who will rise.*" Jesus reminds his listeners that our God is *not the God of the dead but the living!* Marrying for the generation of children is not necessary in the next age, for death has been overcome by the power of Him who makes all things new.

Along our earthly pilgrimage, at times there will be tension and conflict between the *children of this age* and the *children of God*. We will have to choose whether to walk with Christ or with the world. These conflicts are the "shoals" and the "squalls" of which Bishop McCarrick spoke. It is in remembering that we are children of God - that we belong to Him - that He accompanies us - that we discover the strength to faithfully witness to Him in the storms of this life. On a pilgrimage we have an opportunity to be renewed - encouraged by His Word; treated by the medicine of His Mercy; and nourished by the Bread of Life - so that we can continue on that "pilgrim voyage that will one day bring us home" - to fullness of life in heaven.

Do not stand still. Together, let us sail forth once more on this pilgrimage of faith - this adventure in grace!