

**USCCB ADDRESS, June 2016**  
**Orange, California**  
**Most Rev. Christopher Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio**

Dear Brothers in Christ,

This is my first opportunity, since arriving in Washington, D.C. a few days ago, to address you all. Permit me first to express my deep gratitude to His Holiness Pope Francis for the trust he has placed in me in appointing me as his personal representative to this country of the United States of America. I thank Archbishop Kurtz, the President of the Conference, for giving me this opportunity to speak to you, and for the warm welcome also expressed to me through the many letters already received from a great number of bishops. I hope in the course of these coming days to meet each one of you personally.

I come before you today with an open mind and an open heart, pledging to carry on the noble work of the former Nuncios who have served this country, especially my immediate predecessor, Archbishop Viganò. They have continually collaborated with you and have shared in your dedication and devotion to further build up the life of the Church on the United States.

I realize that there is much to be said, but time is limited. I hope that the future will give us the chance to share in a fuller way about the many challenges that are being faced today, through openness and dialogue between ourselves and the society in which we live with its many facets and dimensions.

First of all, I pray that the Holy Spirit, our hope, our inspiration and our Comforter, will continue to give each of us the wisdom, strength and courage that we need to move forward together, so that we can faithfully exercise the role of true pastoral leadership to which we have been called by virtue of our priestly and episcopal office.

I ask in a special way that you pray for me that I always have before me the conviction that without God's help I am nothing but "a useless servant" (Luke 17:10). When Jesus said, "the Son of Man has come not to be served, but to serve," He also added, "and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). To surrender one's life for the sake of the Gospel is the ultimate expression of our sincere love. God asks us in so many ways each day to give up our lives upon the altar of the Cross so that the Church can constantly be reborn. What a tremendous call we share in! We must be ready in so many circumstances in which we find ourselves to respond: *Adsum.*

It is indeed rewarding, when we look back at the past and can see the work of evangelization that has been realized, from the very first bishop, John Carroll, in this young nation that was born in 1783, right up to the present day. The Church of the United States has been able to be a witness of the Gospel in difficult and very heroic circumstances. Truly we have received many graces and many blessings and we should rejoice in that. It does us much good to be able to reflect on the past with the grace of memory – the memory of the journey we have made and the memory of many graces received, and above all the memory of our encounter with Christ in so many circumstances along the way. The memory of wonders produces in our hearts the encounter with Christ. My brothers, we should ask for the grace of memory, in order to increase the spirit of gratitude. We should ask ourselves if we can count the many graces we have received, or have simply forgotten them.

Besides this, I am no stranger to the problems that modern society presents to us: secularism, discrimination, unequal opportunities in life, the limitation of religious freedom as a fundamental human right, the lack of respect for human life and the family, etc. As a community of disciplines of the One who is the truth and the life, we should be a voice for those who have no voice, especially the unborn, the poor, the oppressed, the forgotten, the elderly and the helpless of our world. The Church should continue to be a welcoming home for those who feel alienated and estranged, unwanted and rejected, and a place of healing for those who have been wounded.

As the Holy Father reminds us in his teaching for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy: “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of the pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers... It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and strengths of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.”

This is why we need the strong episcopal leadership that you have been exercising as dedicated, pastoral men who are dauntless shepherds, guiding the flock with courage, teaching and reaching out to the people by word and example, and standing ready in service to the Truth, who is Jesus Christ. We need especially to encourage those who are struggling – spiritually, physically, and emotionally. We need to support our families and our young people, and those who may be lost or confused or who suffer from many forms of addiction.

I firmly believe that you yourselves, my brothers, have worked enthusiastically with your priests, countless religious and lay people – those who have shown such generosity, while prayerfully guiding those searching for truth, and performing untold corporal and spiritual works of mercy in bringing to realization the Kingdom of God in our midst.

May the New Evangelization, the proclamation of the Joy of the Gospel, continue to find a place in the hearts of all those who reach out to us and are touched by our love. As for my own mission in this vast and diverse country, I want to discover and appreciate the beauty and the richness of the many different cultures which the people are so proud of. I want to feel close to the members of this local Church where Christ dwells, especially among those who suffer, the poor. This is what the Holy Father is tirelessly asking for, as we continue to unite ourselves in our communion with him in prayer and in our daily celebration of the Eucharist.

As the personal representative of his Holiness in this country, may I repeat what he told the Bishops last September in his talk to you in Washington D.C.: “The heart of the Pope expands to everyone... May no member of Christ’s Body and the American people feel excluded from the Pope’s embrace... wherever your people gather in the Eucharist assembly, may the Pope be not simply a name but a felt presence...”

In the midst of the great challenges presented to me as the Apostolic Nuncio, I myself will learn first by listening. The Bishops, the priests, the religious, and the lay people will be my teachers. We will help each other.

Let us go forward with confidence and truly trust that our work is not in vain. Let us cling to Christ and rely upon the never failing help of Mary, our Mother, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, the patroness of this country. Let us hasten to act upon her final words in Scripture: “Do whatever He tells you” (John 2:5).

I sincerely thank you for your welcoming me, as even the Pope said in his address to Congress, to “the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

May God bless you all.