

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
MASS FOR THE IMPOSITION OF THE PALLIUM UPON
HIS EXCELLENCY ANDREW BELLISARIO, C.M.,
ARCHBISHOP OF ANCHORAGE-JUNEAU
CO-CATHEDRAL OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2020

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 Andrew Bellisario, the first Archbishop of this newly-combined Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau. Just four years ago, I imposed the pallium upon Archbishop Etienne when he became Archbishop of Anchorage, and now the Lord has brought me back as something new and beautiful begins here in this Archdiocese in this beautiful Co-Cathedral.

Archbishop Bellisario now wears the pallium. 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." (POPE FRANCIS, HOMILY, SOLEMNITY OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL, 29 JUNE 2020)

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 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.

This year, when blessing the pallia, the Holy Father emphasized two themes: unity and prophecy. I just touched upon unity, but with respect to prophecy, he said:

Today we need prophecy, but real prophecy... It makes me sad when I hear someone say, "We want a prophetic Church". All right. But what are you doing, so that the Church can be prophetic? We need lives that show the miracle of God's love. Not forcefulness, but forthrightness. Not palaver, but prayer. Not speeches, but service. ...We are not to become rich, but rather to love the poor. We are not to save up for ourselves, but to spend ourselves for others. To seek not the approval of this world, of being comfortable with everyone - here we say: "being comfortable with God and the devil", being comfortable with everyone; no, this is not prophecy. We need the joy of the world to come. Not better pastoral plans that seem to have their own self-contained efficiency, as

if they were sacraments; efficient pastoral plans, no. We need pastors who offer their lives: lovers of God. (Ibid.)

Your Excellency, this is the prophetic witness to which the Holy Father calls you as you strengthen this Archdiocese and the Diocese of Fairbanks. Prophecy. In the First Reading we heard from the Prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly; to heal the brokenhearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus read this passage in the synagogue (Lk 4:17-19) and used it to explain His mission. Jesus confirmed His identity, for at His baptism the Spirit had descended upon Him (Lk 3:22). He was to be a Spirit-filled Messiah. The passage from Isaiah helps explain not only Jesus' identity but also His mission, in which you, Your Excellency, share in a particular way.

That mission was to bring glad tidings and to proclaim or preach. That is, he was sent to evangelize and to offer the kerygma. His privileged recipients are the poor, the *anawim*. Jesus extends His ministry beyond the materially poor to those who are spiritually poor. His proclamation is one of liberty (*aphesis*). Isaiah's use of this proclamation of liberty refers back to the liberty associated with a jubilee year in Leviticus (Lev 25:10), during which those who were indebted were set free. Jesus' ministry extends beyond those with material debts to those who need relief from the "debt" of their sins. His ministry is one of mercy.

Jesus proclaims liberty to those who are captive. He does so through physical healings. For example, He healed Simon's mother-in-law and the woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit for eighteen years (Lk 13:16). He also proclaimed release to the oppressed, or, rather "He sets at liberty those who are oppressed."

Finally, He announces a year of favor. 2020 does not seem like a year of favor. These are tumultuous times, and yet, Your Excellency, your flock needs a prophetic witness that offers Good News rather than negativity; that offers hope as a remedy for despair; that promises justice to those who are oppressed, whether by poverty due to this pandemic, or whether by racial injustice. The people need to be free from fear and at liberty to pursue justice and peace. Above all, your flock needs love.

In the Gospel, we heard the commandment that Jesus gives His disciples at the Last Supper – to love one another. Jesus shows the depths of His love for His flock, when He lays down His life for the flock. There is no greater love than this. Your love for your flock must be sacrificial. It is interesting to read the "Instruction before Marriage" that was used in the United States prior to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, because it captures this sense of sacrifice:

"And whatever sacrifices you may hereafter be required to make to preserve this common life, always make them generously. Sacrifice is usually difficult and irksome. Only love can make it easy; and perfect love can make it a joy. We are willing to give in proportion as we love. And when love is perfect, the sacrifice is complete. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son; and the Son so loved us that He gave Himself for our salvation."

This beautiful passage reminds us, not only of the sacrificial love of marriage, but of the spousal love which God has for His people. This is the love that you must have – and which you have already demonstrated both here in Anchorage as Rector of the Cathedral and as Bishop of Juneau – for your flock.

This is why Christ, to whom you have been configured, is not merely a Good Shepherd, but a Beautiful Shepherd. God's love for us is beautiful. This love of the Good Shepherd is contrasted with the self-referential actions of other leaders, who look after themselves and their interests – those *who work for pay and have no concern for the sheep*.

In sum, your people need a shepherd in their midst who bears the presence of Christ, the Good Shepherd. The Holy Father noted some of his expectations for you – forthrightness, prayer, service, love for the poor; spending our energies in sacrifice; rejection of worldliness; and pointing others to the Mystery – to *“the joy of the world to come.”*

May Our Lady of Guadalupe, who accompanies with her maternal love and prayers the steps of the pilgrim Church, sustain and support your service and pastoral ministry, and obtain for everyone in this Ecclesiastical Province, the renewed grace to live with courage their vocations as disciples, missionaries, and apostles, in the journey of faith. May Saint Joseph the Worker; St. Therese Lisieux, the patroness of the missions; St. Robert Bellarmine, that model bishop and teacher whose feast we keep today; St. Vincent de Paul, the Apostle of the Poor; and St. Andrew, your patron, who said to his brother Simon, *“We have found the Messiah,”* assist you in your new mission. Finally, may the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, bless you always and abundantly! Amen.