

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
MASS FOR THE IMPOSITION OF THE PALLIUM UPON
HIS EXCELLENCY GREGORY HARTMAYER, O.F.M. CONV.
METROPOLITAN ARCHBISHOP OF ATLANTA
SAINT PETER CHANEL CHURCH, ROSWELL, GEORGIA
OCTOBER 7, 2020

Your Excellencies, Fathers, Religious, Seminarians and Members of the People of God, Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the beginning of Mass, I had imposed the pallium upon Archbishop Gregory Hartmayer, the seventh archbishop of the Archdiocese of Atlanta. The pallium is a piece of fabric woven with lamb's wool, which Pope Francis blessed on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. It is simple yet full of meaning. The Holy Father said: "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 of every Bishop is 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.

Your Excellency, you know the people of this Archdiocese and the Bishops of this Province well. We have every confidence that you will strengthen them in unity following the example of the Apostles, who, as our First Reading said, *devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.*

This year, when blessing the pallia, the Holy Father emphasized two themes: unity and prophecy. I just touched upon unity. 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 other Dioceses of the Province. Prophecy. This prophetic spirit is seen in Jesus' Mother, whom we honor today on this Feast of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary.

We just heard the Gospel of the Annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel who greeted Mary with the words, "*Hail, full of grace*". In view of her mission, by a singular grace, Mary was transformed, and this transformation defines her identity as the Immaculate Conception and the Mother of the Redeemer. Free from sin, her heart was free to say *Yes* to God. Your Excellency, as Metropolitan, your heart too must continue to be free to say *Yes* to God as a Shepherd configured to Mary's Son.

While many translations say, "Hail, full of grace," in Greek, the Angel says, "*Rejoice, full of grace.*" Hearing these words, Mary must have immediately thought of the words of Zephaniah (3:14-17): *Rejoice, daughter of Zion; shout for joy, Israel ... the King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst.*"

What was spoken once to a whole people was now uttered to her! It is interesting that in Greek, the words joy (*chará*) and grace (*charis*) go together. In her would be fulfilled the promise of the long-expected Messiah – the one who brings joy and grace to the world!

Unlike Zechariah, she does not refuse to believe; rather, she merely inquires how it will happen. She receives God's Word and tries to understand its meaning for her life. As a model of faith, Mary thought about how God's plan might come about and asked: "*How shall this be?*" (Luke 1:34).

Her faith had grown over the years through an attentive listening to God, which allowed her to entrust herself to His plans for her life. She listened to the Word of God in order to abandon herself entirely to His Word. We learn from Mary that we find true joy in doing whatever He tells us – according to His plan and in His time. As disciples, even as bishops, at times we want our vocation on our terms. Mary teaches us that everything must be surrendered to God.

The angel understood Mary's question and told her: *Do not be afraid.*" One must imagine the burden she had to face, knowing that she would carry God within her! Mary could say "*Let it be done to me according to Your Word*" because she knew that God would carry her – support her. She would be willing to do whatever God asked; she freely and willingly surrendered herself. She gave her consent.

She said *Yes* to God – a *Yes* which changed the world. If Eve brought sin into the world by listening to the voice of the serpent, now Mary, by listening to the voice of God, brings the Redeemer into the world. The Fathers of the Church say that "she conceived through her ears" – by listening to God.

But once she conceived, she could not keep this Good News to herself; she hastened to meet Elizabeth. She was both a disciple and a missionary! Mary arrived at an important decision to say *Yes* to God and later to visit Elizabeth, by taking her time and thinking things through, offering an example of a Church that goes forth. Pope Francis tells us:

"It is difficult in life to take decisions. We often tend to put them off, to let others decide instead. We frequently prefer to let ourselves be dragged along by events, to follow the current fashion; at times, we know what we ought to do but do not have the courage to do it, or it seems too difficult because it means swimming against the tide. In the Annunciation, in the Visitation ... Mary goes against the tide; she listens to God, she reflects and seeks to understand reality and decides to entrust herself totally to God.

Although she is with child, she decides to visit her elderly relative and she decides to entrust herself to her Son with insistence so as to preserve the joy of the wedding feast.”

(ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER, 31 MAY 2013)

Mary gives us the good example of listening and reflecting in order to take prophetic action. How necessary this is for the Church today – to be prophetic – in welcoming the gift of life, in welcoming the stranger, in building a culture of encounter, in maintaining the Church in unity! We see the difference her Yes to God made: it changed our world! That is the joyful news of the feast! What difference might our prophetic Yes make in our Church and our world?!

In the dark moments, we must listen to the word of the Archangel Gabriel once more: “*Rejoice, full of grace!*” At times, difficult circumstances make our mission seem almost impossible to fulfill. Was it any different at the Battle of Lepanto on this day in 1571? At that time, St. Pius V asked the Faithful to turn to Our Lady and to pray the Rosary. A miraculous victory was won that day. In Venetian Senate hangs a painting of the battle which the following inscription below it: “*Non virtus, non arma, non duces, sed Maria Rosarii victores nos fecit* (Neither the troops nor weapons, nor the commanders, but Mary of the Rosary who made us the victorious).”

Today our struggles are different – secularization; polarization; racial strife and civil unrest; illness and fear; growing poverty and inequality; and new ideologies contrary to the Gospel – but they are real struggles. To whom shall we turn? His Holiness reminds us:

“And in the struggle which the disciples must confront – all of us, all the disciples of Jesus, we must face this struggle – Mary does not leave them alone: the Mother of Christ and of the Church is always with us. She walks with us always, she is with us. ... Mary accompanies us, struggles with us, sustains Christians in their fight against the forces of evil. Prayer with Mary... has this “suffering” dimension, that is of struggle, a sustaining prayer in the battle against the evil one and his accomplices. The Rosary also sustains us in the battle.” (HOMILY FOR THE ASSUMPTION, 15 AUGUST 2013)

Your Excellency, the people of this Metropolitan Archdiocese are looking for you to lead them, in prayer with Mary, in the spiritual battles of our day. 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.*”

This is what Mary did. She brought joy to the world and sustained the Apostles in their struggle, and this is what you must do. Your vocation is to be a Shepherd who draws people above the purely material to recognize the Divine Presence and Power in their midst. Your vocation, at its core, 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, magnanimity, and love; that the family of God, like Mary, is called to go forth bringing the joy of the Gospel to the world.

Your Excellency, in the name of the Lord, very consciously and with firm and growing faith, trust, love, sustained by the Holy Spirit, joining your hands, will, and heart to those of your brother Bishops of your suffragan dioceses, I exhort you to offer to the Flock of Christ a truly prophetic witness.

May Our Lady, who accompanies with her maternal love, sustain and support your service and pastoral ministry, and obtain for our brothers in the episcopacy, priests, consecrated persons and laity of

this Ecclesiastical Province, the renewed grace and strength that will help us to live with courage, in fidelity and joy, our vocations as disciples, missionaries, and apostles. May Mary Immaculate, Saint Pius the Tenth, Saint Peter Chanel, and, of course, Saint Francis of Assisi, help you bear witness to the power of Christ, the Son of Mary. May the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, bless you always and abundantly! Amen.