



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE CANONIZATION
OF BISHOP JOHN NEUMANN***

Monday, 20 June 1977

Venerable Brothers, dear Bishops from America.

We bless the Providence of God that has brought us to the joy of this day: the common celebration of our ecclesial communion on the occasion of the Canonization of Bishop John Neumann.

We have seen once again how the power of Christ's Resurrection is perennially effective in the Church of God, and how through the action of the Holy Spirit, and for the glory of the Father, it continues to bring forth, in each generation, fruits of holiness of life.

And because our new Saint is a Bishop-an American Bishop-we are especially happy to have this opportunity to express to you our affection in the Lord, and with you to reflect on the Episcopal office that you are called to exercise in the name of Jesus Christ, "the chief Shepherd" (1 *Petr.* 5, 4) of the Church.

As Vicar of Christ we thank you for your partnership in the Gospel, for all the labor and fatigue you expend, in order to bring the name of Jesus and the life-giving and uplifting message of the Gospel to his people. In virtue of our own charism as Successor of Peter, we feel compelled to speak to you a word of challenge, exhortation and encouragement. Permit us to open to you our heart. Our sentiments are sentiments of esteem, of interest and of love.

Dear brothers, we have been chosen to continue the action of the Good Shepherd in the world; we are ministers of the mysteries of God. We have been called to preside humbly at what the Second Vatican Council calls "the table both of the word of God and of the Body of Christ" (*Dei Verbum*, 21). By its very nature, our ministry of word and sacrament is placed under the sign of fidelity to

Jesus Christ-absolute fidelity to Jesus Christ. We have received a sacred trust, according to a plan that infinitely supersedes human wisdom. Our vocation is one of spiritual leadership and pastoral accountability: to guide God's people "in right paths for his name's sake" (*Ps.* 23, 3).

The word of God is the message that we proclaim; it is the criterion of our preaching; it is light and direction for the lives of our people. We have no hope outside of God's word. Apart from it, there are no valid solutions to the problems of our day. The faithful preaching of God's word-in all its purity, with all its exigencies, in all its power-constitutes the highest priority of our ministry, because all else depends on this. Aware of its relevance in our day, we do not hesitate to repeat the solemn charge Paul made to Timothy with apostolic seriousness and with great simplicity and confidence: "Before God and before Christ Jesus . . . I put this duty to you proclaim the message and, welcome or unwelcome, insist on it. Refute falsehood, correct error, call to obedience-but do all with patience and with the intention of teaching" (*2 Tim.* 4, 1-2). And with a realistic awareness of certain challenges today to Catholic teaching, not least of which is in the field of sexual morality, we add: "Far from being content with sound teaching, people will be avid for the latest novelty and collect themselves a whole series of teachers according to their own tastes; and them, instead of listening to the truth they will turn to myths. Be careful always to choose the right course; be brave under trials; make the preaching of the Good News your life's work, in thoroughgoing service" (*2 Tim.* 4, 3-5).

Brethren, these words are a whole program of apostolic charity. They are the expression of love, and when followed, they constitute a great pastoral service to our people. They were an inspiration to John Neumann; they were a holy challenge to every Bishop who ever lived. They represent fidelity to Jesus Christ, and to all his words, which are indeed "spirit and life" (*Io.* 6, 63). The most profound pastoral understanding, the deepest human compassion exist only in fidelity to God's word. There is no division, no dichotomy, no opposition between God's commands and our pastoral service. If all the exigencies of the Christian message are not preached, our apostolic charity is incomplete.

As Bishops of the Church of God, we must humbly ask for strength, so as not to be "tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine" (*Eph.* 4, 14). Let us speak out; let us proclaim the message of the Beatitudes; let us exercise personally with ever greater energy our teaching mission: to teach as Jesus taught.

Understanding? Yes. Compassion? Yes. Sensitivity? Yes. But supernatural sensitivity, and fidelity to Jesus Christ and to his Cross and Resurrection. With John Neumann let us say over and over again : *Passio Christi conforta me!*

And let us always remember that the Holy Spirit is with us, to enable us to give this special loving service to our people, to enable us-in the living communion of the Church-to discern and preach the true exigencies of Christian life. Once more, let us listen to Paul's advice to Timothy: ". . . for

God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control" (2 *Tim.* 1, 7). And with this power and love and self-control, let us face all the challenges of our ministry. The true good of God's holy people is at stake. Our vocation prompts each of us to say: "For this Gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher" (2 *Tim.* 1, 11).

And on the basis of God's word we must lay down our lives, like John Neumann, in persevering service to our brethren. Whereupon, all the suffering and anxieties and problems of God's people truly do affect us because they affect the brethren of Jesus, and because we constantly hear Jesus talking to his Father, saying: "Tui erant et mihi eos dedisti, et . . . servabam eos in Nomine tuo" (*Io.* 17, 6. 12). To fulfill this role, all the actions of our lives and of our sacramental ministry must be regulated according to God's word.

In conclusion, Venerable Brothers, we beseech you to guard the content of the Catholic and apostolic faith. Speak about it often to your people; discuss it with your priests and deacons and religious. We ask you to fulfill with loving personal attention your great pastoral responsibility to your seminarians: know the content of their courses, encourage them to love the word of God and never to be ashamed of the seeming folly of the Cross.

There are many other things we would like to speak to you about. They all touch upon our ministry as a model for yours: absolute fidelity to Jesus Christ, true pastoral service to God's people. But meanwhile, we prayerfully commend you all to the intercession of John Neumann, and we propose his ministry as a model for yours own and for all your brother Bishops throughout the world. And we would like to end, using words that we wrote to you in our Bicentennial Letter, a year ago this month:

"And in this way, Brethren, let us go forward-forward together, in the name of the Lord, in the name of Jesus. It is he who tells us: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and faith in me" (*Io.* 14, 1).

"With God's grace there is no hardship we cannot endure, no difficulty we cannot sustain, no obstacle we cannot overcome for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and for the glory of his name. In this name, Brethren-in the holy name of Jesus-we impart to you and to all our sons and daughters in America our special Apostolic Blessing".