

A Call for 'Other Hands - Your Hands'

The cover photo of last week's Catholic Review captured so well both the Pallium Mass itself, as well as the emotions it evoked! After much prayer and anticipation, the moment captured in the photograph provided an emotional spiritual crescendo for me and, I hope, for the many pilgrims who journeyed to Rome. Now, a little more than a week later, I reflect on the day and on our entire Pilgrimage to Rome - with its moments of liturgical and private prayer, opportunities to socialize and rejoice in the wealth of our tradition, and periods of quiet, to rest and reflect. I hope that those who made the pilgrimage found the blessed occasion to be as spiritually enriching as I did - a personally fulfilling experience of our Catholicism.

Our Baltimore pilgrimage group carried more than 150 souls from all over the country, surely with the largest contingent from the Archdiocese. I was especially grateful for the supportive presence of Cardinal Keeler, our three auxiliary bishops, a number of religious and seminarians, and more than 20 Baltimore priests who, as always, walked and prayed "in the midst of our people." Pleased as I was with the good number of laity who joined our group, I was inspired by the many Baltimoreans unable to accompany us in person, but assured me of their prayers.

It was a stirring demonstration of our Catholic Church's universality, as the 40 pallium recipients representing 31 countries of the world came together, with their faithful, for this historic Mass so rich in symbolism. That the event initiated the Pauline year (commemorating the 2,000th anniversary of St. Paul's birth) and that our Holy Father took the occasion to welcome and host His Holiness Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, stressed as well as anything could, the new archbishops' responsibilities always to preach Jesus Christ and His Gospel not just within their own jurisdictions but to east and west, to all of humanity.

During the June 29 Mass, the Holy Father directly addressed the archbishops concerning the pallia, which would soon be brought from below where they rested at the tomb of St. Peter, to the high altar of the Basilica to be blessed and imposed by him. He reminded us that the sheep's wool from which they are woven makes the

pallia “a symbol of the flock of Christ over which you preside.”

The Pope then placed the pallia about each archbishop’s shoulders, to represent “the lost sheep that cannot find its way home alone” which the Good Shepherd is called to bring back to the fold. The pallium then becomes a tangible reminder of every pastor’s call to serve in imitation of Christ who opened his arms on the cross to bring all humanity home.

The Pope cited the Lord’s triple challenge to Peter at the Sea of Tiberius, after his Resurrection: ‘Do you love me? Then feed my lambs, feed my sheep.’

“Every time we put on the pallium as a pastor of Christ’s flock we must listen to this question: ‘Do you love me?’ and allow ourselves to be questioned about the extra love that he expects from the pastor,” the Pope said.

The Holy Father’s words during the Mass, which occurred on the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, brought to mind his message to all contemporary disciples during his April visit to our country as several times he called for a “new evangelization.” Specifically, he challenged the youth at St. Joseph’s Seminary in Dunwoodie, New York, to turn their hearts to God and to avoid the tragedies facing so many of America’s young today – substance abuse, poverty, violence, etc., promoted by the hands of darkness:

“Such tragedies also point out what might have been and what could be were there other hands – your hands – reaching out. I encourage you to invite them, especially the vulnerable and the innocent, to join you along the way of goodness and hope.”

Evangelization is the task of all of us – “All hands on deck!” So the conferral of the pallium was not a merely personal event for each archbishop. Just as Christ called Peter to strengthen the faith of the other apostles, so, too, did the Successor of Saint Peter call his brothers to a new evangelization – for these archbishops to renew, with the grace of God, our commitment to love and to spread Christ’s Gospel to all of God’s people.

I renew my pledge to do this, but I will need all hands, “other hands – your hands – reaching out” too, and in the months to follow I look forward to discussing ways to

do just that, together, with and in Christ.

[Archbishop O'Brien's column will appear occasionally through the summer months.]