

# Faith Walk Pilgrimage

## Introduction

I extend a very warm welcome to all those pilgrims who have taken part in the Faith Walk as part of the 225th Anniversary of the Archdiocese of Baltimore. I am especially happy to welcome you to this Basilica of the Assumption, “America’s First Cathedral”, on this the 208th anniversary of the laying of its cornerstone by Archbishop John Carroll in 1808.

The Faith Walk did not involve great distances; it was not a spiritual 5K! But it did cover a lot of territory in terms of the history of the Church in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and in the United States, a heritage of which we are rightly proud. On this walk, you visited this Basilica designed by Benjamin Latrobe, the architect of the Capitol, and completed in 1821, a site of so many historic occasions for the Church in the United States. You visited St. Alphonsus Parish which dates to 1845 where St. John Neumann served as Pastor and was ordained a bishop and where Blessed Francis Seelos also served as Pastor. And you made your way to Seton House where St. Elizabeth Ann Seton founded first Catholic school in the United States and the original St. Mary’s Seminary on Paca Street where generations of priests were formed and served not only in Baltimore but in dioceses throughout the United States.

As we celebrate this heritage we are also challenged not to treat our faith as a museum piece or as an artifact of days gone by. No, we are challenged as were our ancestors to embrace the faith, here and now, in our circumstances, even as they embraced it in their circumstances. And if you were not fortunate enough to take part in this Faith Walk, do not fret. This wonderful heritage is all around us, open and ready to receive visitors, and from the vantage point of this Basilica easily accessible to our mind’s eye as we spend but a moment reflecting on this afternoon’s Scripture readings.

## Rejoicing in the Lord

First, there is the theme of rejoicing. The prophet Zechariah invites us to rejoice, and to rejoice heartily, because the Lord comes to us in humility and love, a humility and love that is stronger and more powerful than any form of human force. In the

Gospel, Jesus who is meek and humble of heart, who entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey, as people shouted “hosanna!” – Jesus gives praise to the Father for revealing the secrets of his heart not to the wise and the learned but rather to those who are meek & humble of heart.

When we see the beautiful simplicity of the seminary chapel at Paca Street or the soaring arches and reredos of St. Alphonsus or the magnificent dome of this Basilica we realize that those who went before us rejoiced in the Lord, they rejoiced in and cherished their Catholic faith, and expressed with human artistry a deep joy that the Lord dwelt with them, loved them, protected them. Most of our ancestors were not wealthy people and often they faced overt prejudice & discrimination because they were Catholic. Yet what they left behind gives evidence of a confident faith & an indomitable joy. It is not only from the pages of history but in the communion of saints that they say to us to rejoice, to take heart, to hope, for the Lord is near.

### **Lay Aside the Burdens of Life**

We cannot look at these beautiful buildings without listening in our hearts to Christ’s beautiful words: “Come to me all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest...”

How often our forebears in the faith sat in these pews and poured out their hearts to the Lord. In these parishes and in these places of worship, how many prayed for loved ones who were ill, how many mourned loved ones killed on battlefields, how many asked help with their marriages or in finding employment. We should not forget that it was ordinary people with ordinary problems whose generosity and vision built these monuments of faith. They did so not because their lives were easy or untroubled but rather because they sought and found refuge in time of trouble.

Jesus invited them as he invites us to come away and rest. He invites us here and now in these beautiful places of worship, to leave behind our busy lives and our preoccupations, and to open our hearts to him in love and in friendship. We sometimes may think that if we give God a chance, he’ll give us a hard time and add to our worries and burdens. It is quite the opposite. Jesus who meek and humble of heart invites us to lay everything at his feet, to tell him what it is that worries us and bothers us, to trust him as a friend. He does not ask that we arrived in perfect

condition but only that we believe in him, trust him, and seek to love him more. The yoke he wishes to put on our shoulders is that we would be like him – meek and humble of heart so that his love can work in our hearts to transform us, to make us inwardly beautiful, peaceful, and joyful, even in the face of life's troubles.

## **Repentance**

Then there is words of St. Paul this afternoon about not living our lives according to the flesh but rather living them according to the Spirit. In other words, instead of leading self-centered lives mired in sin, St. Paul tells us that true friends and disciples of Jesus open their hearts to the Spirit and it is the Holy Spirit who enables them to reject sin, grow in virtue, and imitate Christ as members of the Church in leading lives of self-giving love.

Here I think about the long lines of people waiting to go to confession to St. John Neumann and Bl. Francis Seelos ... lines that are said to have stretched around the block. You can still see the confessional where Bl. Francis Seelos heard confessions and you and I can go there almost any day of the week to have our sins forgiven, so that we might live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. I also think of the school St. Elizabeth Ann Seton opened on Paca Street to provide not only an education but also catechetical and moral formation for her students and their families. And at St. Mary's Seminary, generations of priests were formed so that they could serve in parishes as confessors and spiritual guides, helping untold parishioners to reject sin, to embrace Christ, to live the faith.

## **Conclusion**

Just two days ago we celebrated the birth of our nation and here in Baltimore we celebrate how the faith took root in our nation right from the start. May we cherish our heritage by casting our cares upon the Lord, by living our faith with confidence, humility, and love, and by defending and promoting the God-given gift of religious freedom.

May God bless us and keep us always in His love!