

Missionary Spirit

It was barely six months ago that I took possession of this Premier See of our Nation. You might recall that I began the liturgical events of the occasion in this historic basilica with a prayerful visit to the crypt below to kneel before the remains of our founding bishop, John Carroll, whose pectoral cross I am wearing.

Bishop Carroll took possession of his See in December, 1790 and his inaugural sermon makes clear his state of mind. Of his appointment he said, "I have always dreaded it." And given the immense challenge that faced him it is easy to see why. "Everything had to be raised from its foundation," he said with scant resources at hand and a Catholic people among the poorest in the city and countryside. He specified the challenge in his sermon: canonical structures, schools, native clergy, a newly-founded seminary, schools and the evangelization of her near and distant flock.

His goal, he said, was "to have nothing in view but God and your salvation." He went on to say, "My heart sinks almost under the impression of terror which comes upon it. In God alone can I find any consolation...He will not abandon me...Pray, dear brethren, pray incessantly (for me)."

Pray, they must have. And no, God did not abandon him.

As founding bishop, this premier missionary and persevering evangelizer of our new nation truly laid the foundation of Catholicism in America. He convinced Rome and some skeptics at home of the compatibility of Catholicism and a free democracy. A friend and confidant of Benjamin Franklin, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson and a supporter of many civil causes and institutions, what Washington is to our country, John Carroll is to the Church in our country. In his 25 years of shepherding, the Catholic population of the expansive Church of Baltimore doubled as did our number of native priests. He founded three colleges and two seminaries and strongly promoted the foundation of many religious orders, receiving the vows of the now St. Elizabeth Seton. He would go on to encourage and support

the establishment of both the first distinctly American community of religious women and of the first Catholic school in our land.

The list of Archbishop Carroll's accomplishments could continue almost endlessly. But as we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, and as we prayerfully mark The World Day of Prayer for Vocations, it is good to take stock of the spiritual wealth of the Church in our land and its humbleness of all beginnings. A sheepfold few in number then, and now so vast – surely due to Christ's good shepherding of a flock certain of his presence, and consequently full of hope: If the Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.

As we enter our third century as an Archdiocese, our challenges are different from those faced by Archbishop Carroll, but no less daunting. Now as then, the sheepfold, which is the Church, can never be an island, isolated and impervious to the people she serves. We Catholics cannot rest, and never have rested, contently and complacently in our secure sheepfold. Indeed in our midst are pastures poisoned with drugs, dark valleys overwhelmed with the hopeless homeless, fields plagued by abortion mills, reverberating with gunshots and murders. There are tables not filled, but empty of food both for the physically hungry and for the spiritually starved. And this, not solely in pockets of Baltimore City but in areas large and small, urban and suburban, indeed in all counties of our great Archdiocese.

Archbishop Carroll was proud and ever aware of this country's blessings and insisted that they be shared by all, saying:

"Freedom and independence, acquired by the united efforts and cemented with the mingled blood of Protestants and Catholic fellow citizens, should be equably enjoyed by all."

I have had the privilege these six months to be witness to daily deeds of love and concern for neighbor that hold out solid hope. I have seen our priests and Protestant ministers joining their flocks to solve pressing community problems; Jewish friends generously supporting Catholic Charities on behalf of the neediest of all faiths and no faith; teachers totally committed to forming and mentoring the next generations of American citizens, rather than settling for lesser-challenging and higher-paying employment; more prosperous parishes partnering with those that are

needier.

I have come to know the great works of our own Catholic Charities, whose presence is felt in every corner of our Archdiocese, from the tidal waters of the Chesapeake Bay to the mountains of Garrett County. Our thousands of employees and volunteers tirelessly ‘cherish the divine within’ every person they serve in countless ways. Having now seen first-hand many of the ministries of Catholic Charities, I am ever more convinced that our Lord’s call to serve the neediest among us is truly lived out in our Archdiocese every day. And every person assisted has a profoundly moving story to tell. Whether they are one of the 1700 seniors living in one of the 19 different seniors’ residences, or the 7,500 children adopted by loving families in our Archdiocese over the last 65 years, or the 400 developmentally disabled adults in our adult day programs, or the 700 people who simply enjoy a hot nutritious meal, their lives have been touched by others willing to proclaim Christ’s love. That we honor His Eminence William Cardinal Keeler following this Mass is especially appropriate on this Good Shepherd Sunday in light of all that he has done these nineteen years to initiate and expand the charitable and educational mission of this Archdiocese so significantly.

What I have witnessed, in short, is a missionary zeal of which John Carroll himself would be proud, priests – religious and diocesan – brothers and sisters in consecrated life, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers, purposefully and joyfully witnessing to the Master’s pivotal Gospel invitation.

Lay people, giving and giving again of their time, talent and treasure to serve in our parishes and schools, on our Archdiocesan boards and hundreds of service projects that the Good Shepherd’s flock might have life and have it more abundantly.

As we today recall and stir up the grace of the Holy Spirit that then enkindled the zeal and guided the successors of Archbishop John Carroll, and all our Catholic ancestors, we call upon that same Holy Spirit for renewed energy in our local Church of Baltimore to make Jesus Christ better known and loved in our communities.

At every Mass, the Holy Spirit is called down upon the gifts of bread and wine to transform them into Christ’s Body and Blood, the Eucharist. And is not the very

purpose of the Eucharist to transform us into Christ so that He can continue His works of love through us? "By this will the world know that you are my disciples, that you love one another."

The divine energy of renewal that we seek, the strength for the task of renewed evangelization, will always be available from within the sheepfold. And, it will come most especially in the Sunday Eucharist, Holy Mass celebrated prayerfully, reverently, and with a joyful spirit in each of our churches. The Eucharist has enormous potential for renewing the Church in Baltimore. And how especially effective in drawing us to Christ in the Mass, is Eucharistic adoration outside of Mass. Pope Benedict, whom we prepare to welcome to our nation this week, reminds us, "The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place in the liturgical celebration itself." I confidently look forward to the initiatives which our new office of liturgy will be taking this fall to promote a new, Eucharistic-centered evangelization, ever in support of our parishes.

Elsewhere I have recently noted the inevitable and consistent connection between Eucharistic adoration and vocations to consecrated life and the priesthood. I thank those parishes that have given our faithful people opportunities during the week to pray before the exposed Blessed Sacrament and there to offer special prayers for vocations. I am asking our Catholic Review periodically to highlight the churches and chapels throughout the Archdiocese that offer such opportunities for Eucharistic adoration listing specific days and hours.

From the first diocesan synod in Baltimore in 1791 to the present, the need for priests has been a principal concern to the Archbishops of Baltimore. Then as now, we have been blessed by the commitment of religious clergy who greatly enrich our parishes and schools with their distinctive Catholic spirituality and sensitive pastoral care. Many have immigrated to our shores with faithful from their European homelands. Probably more than any other diocese in our country, Baltimore continues to be blessed by these selfless women and men as an integral part of our Catholic family and our heritage.

We can be rightly and uniquely proud as well of Mother Mary Lange who founded the Oblate Sisters of Providence here in 1829. The Oblates' mission has

expanded beyond the borders of Maryland and the United States. One day, we pray Mother Mary will be raised to the altar, universally recognized for the saintly life that continues to inspire her daughters.

Surely, as we look ahead, this rich soil of premier Catholicism holds the seeds of many such future consecrated religious who will continue to serve the poor and disenfranchised who will always be with us.

Certainly, no diocese can do without a strong core of diocesan priests and through the decades this premier See has boasted a presbyterate of unrivaled excellence. Such is the case today. Despite the many imaginative vocational initiatives in recent years, this Archdiocese must be concerned about the future of our priesthood.

I call upon all our parishes and schools to address directly and on all levels the need for priests to serve the People of God in the years ahead.

I would briefly address the many young men in our Catholic community whom, I am convinced, God is calling to the priesthood. Our culture, our Church of Baltimore, with hope looks forward to a new generation of American missionaries with John Carroll's single and simple purpose: only God and our salvation.

I have also been privileged in recent years to witness the heroism of your generation, to see so many willing to give their lives totally and even to death for others in the service of this nation. I will continue to challenge you, young Catholics of Baltimore, to do so in service of God and Christ's Church.

You might find stimulating the words of another Bishop of early Baltimore, the Sulpician William Louis DuBourg who founded the present St. Mary's Seminary and University. In 1812, he was named administrator of the territory of Louisiana. Finding himself desperately short of priests in this new, French-speaking territory, he wrote to all the seminaries in France seeking seminarian volunteers to venture here as missionaries. Posters were placed throughout the dioceses of France with this unlikely promise:

We offer you: no salary, no recompense, no holidays, no pension. But much hard

work, a poor dwelling, few consolations, many disappointments, frequent sickness, a violent or lonely death, an unknown grave.

And they came. They came because Jesus Christ was at the heart of it and was alive in them. They came in good numbers with the missionary heart of John Carroll: "In God alone can I find any consolation... He will not abandon me."

Good people of God, young and old, Baltimore is as much a missionary diocese now as it was 200 years ago. Look around and have no doubt. Yes, we now have countless more structures and buildings and programs, but we are ever in need of more hearts and souls convinced that as Christ the Good Shepherd laid down his life to save his sheep, so must each of us strive, by virtue of our very baptism, to do the same.

It is in that spirit that I close with the words of our first bishop, premier missionary, and persevering evangelizer. Following that Diocesan Synod of 1791, Bishop Carroll wrote a pastoral letter to his people, the first such pastoral in the United States. He concluded with a Pauline prayer:

For this cause I bow my knee to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts; that being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God. Now to Him, who is able to do all things more abundantly than we desire or understand to Him be glory in the church, and in Christ Jesus unto all generations, world without end. Amen.