

The Yoke That Binds

The Catholic Review

You are probably reading this on or about Sunday, June 29, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul. On that day, I will be privileged to be receiving the pallium at the hands of Pope Benedict XVI during a Mass in the Basilica of St. Peter.

The pallium is a circular band that is worn over the chasuble, the outer Mass vestment. The strip is two inches wide and has a twelve inch pendant, front and back.

Its liturgical origins reach far back, probably to the fourth or fifth century. Originally, it was worn by the Pope as a sign of his unique universal jurisdiction. By the ninth century, the Pope granted the privilege of the pallium to metropolitan archbishops—that is an archbishop with limited jurisdiction over one or more dioceses or suffragan Sees. (The dioceses in the Baltimore Province are Wilmington, Arlington, Wheeling-Charleston, and Richmond.) Since 1984, all metropolitan archbishops are expected to pilgrimage to Rome to receive their pallium on June 29, the great Solemnity.

Every year on January 21, the feast of St. Agnes (agnus in Latin means lamb), the Holy Father blesses two lambs. Then, around holy week, the lambs are shorn and the wool goes into the making of the pallia which are blessed and then placed against the tomb of St. Peter directly below the high altar of St. Peter's Basilica for conferral on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. This obvious symbolism indicates the unity of the archbishops, and their suffragans, with the successor of St. Peter.

But there is more subtle symbolism as well in the image of the lamb, so central to this ancient sacramental:

- the lost lamb being carried on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd back to the fold;
- the Paschal Lamb, innocent, sacrificing himself for the salvation of his people;

- the yoke which Christ invited his disciples to bear: “Take my yoke upon you for my yoke is easy and my burden light.”

The metropolitan archbishop is entitled to wear the pallium only within the territory of his province. The Pope alone wears it everywhere as a sign of his universal jurisdiction. Incidentally, the pallium worn by Pope Benedict XVI is now different from the pallium he confers on Sunday. His pallium is similar to the ancient, longer and broader style seen in mosaics of the early Church.

Gratefully, I am accompanied by more than 100 friends from Baltimore and from among the faithful representing my prior places of ministry. I pray it will be a holy pilgrimage for all who take part.

What a graphic reminder of the unity that we all enjoy with the bishop of Rome, successor of St. Peter and head of the College of Bishops. Intense will my prayer be that day for all in our Archdiocese and in our suffragan dioceses.

My good friend Archbishop Timothy Dolan of Milwaukee summed it up beautifully (as he usually does) in a recent note of congratulations: “We are now bonded (might we well say banded) even more closely as we ‘yoke’ ourselves to the successor of St. Peter in donning the pallium.”

To which I can only add: Amen! Thanks be to God.