

THE PASTOR'S DESK

January 3, 2010 - Feast of Saint John Neumann



Dear Parishioners,

Happy New Year! Happy Feast of the Epiphany. There seems to be so much going on in the Church this time of year. With the Holy Days and the Sundays, it may seem that you have spent all your time in Church. Oh, well, there are worse places to spend your time. There is one more special feast for us to celebrate. This Tuesday, January 5th is the Feast of our patron, St. John Neumann. We will have a special Mass at 7:30 pm in honor of his feast. As it is the patronal feast of our parish, this is truly a high feast, which, for us, ranks higher than Masses on Sunday or in the Christmas Season. We will also bless the beautiful picture of St. John Neumann given us by the Peruvian missions in August. I hope many of you will come to this celebration. St. John Neumann is a wonderful and powerful patron. As we honor him may he protect us and pray for the many favors we request and need.



In recognition of this celebration, let me reprint part an article from earlier this year, which recounts St. John Neumann's last days. For a few years leading up to his death, he occasionally felt symptoms of heart failure. He would never see a doctor, though, and kept all the symptoms to himself. In those days, there was really nothing that could be done for heart problems. The only thing that could be done was forced rest, the life of an invalid. Bishop Neumann would have none of that. Once, while visiting his Franciscan Sisters, he asked them to pray for someone who was much sicker than anyone imagined.

During Christmas Season of 1859-1860, Bishop Neumann went about his duties. He didn't ease up on his schedule even though his symptoms were very acute. He visited his Redemptorists brethren. They have an annual Christmas conventual where, among other things, they are given a Patron, an Intention, and a Virtue for the coming year. Bishop Neumann's were: Patron: Mary

Immaculate; Intention: Catholic Schools; and Virtue: Live each day as if it were your last.

On the twelfth day of Christmas, January 5, 1860, John Neumann had the opportunity to live that virtue. That morning, he received a surprise visit from a Redemptorist priest from Pittsburgh, Fr. Urban. Neumann had an attack when Fr. Urban entered the room. His eyesight was blurred and he barely recognized the young priest whom he himself had ordained. He quickly recovered and was able to give Fr. Urban a blessing for an upcoming retreat. He then went out on some errands, thinking the walk and the cold air would do him some good. He walked to the train depot to have a chalice delivered to an outlying parish. He went to a lawyer's office to sign some papers. As he walked along Vine Street praying his rosary, he collapsed into the snow-covered street. He was moved into a nearby house where he died a short time later. The priest who was called anointed his already lifeless body.

His funeral was the largest to date in Philadelphia. He was laid to rest in St. Peter's church with his beloved Redemptorists. In 1921 he was declared Venerable; in 1963 he was declared Blessed; and on June 19, 1977 he was declared a Saint by Pope Paul VI.

The next year, 1978 our parish was founded under the patronage of the newly-named Saint. May the prayers of patronage of such a great saint always help us to become a community reflecting the love of Christ, a love that animated the life of St. John Neumann.

Let me take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped make the celebration of the Christmas Season so wonderful. I'm always shy about mentioning names for fear of leaving forgetting someone. But, I must thank MaryLu Hartsell for her heroic work in leading our music program. MaryLu even spent the night in the church at Christmas to make sure she was here in case there was freezing rain! Thanks, also, to the choir and all the singers and musicians. Thanks to all the sacristans, altar servers, and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. Thanks to all the ushers and all those who helped to clear snow and ice off of the sidewalks. Thanks to all who decorated the church so beautifully. We all owe a debt of gratitude to everyone who worked so hard to make this year's celebration of Christmas so moving.

In case anyone missed the announcement last week, Fr. William Brailsford has been assigned as our new parochial vicar. He is coming here from St. Ann's in Tenley Circle. His assignment here will begin on January 27th. I know we are all looking forward to welcoming him.

All blessings and peace be with you and your families in the New Year.

**God bless,
Fr. LaHood**