



THE PASTOR'S DESK

August 2, 2009 - Lessons from the Life of St. John Neumann

Dear Parishioners,

I'm still making my way through the biography of St. John Neumann I found among my books when I moved. It is my bed-time reading before turning off the light. Fr. Neumann joined the Redemptorists because he felt the need for the discipline of the religious life. When he was out ministering by himself, he sensed his spiritual life was becoming undisciplined and unfocused. Whenever his good intentions for spiritual practices fell by the wayside, the Latin phrase *Vae Soli* (beware of being alone) would come to mind. For priests and those in consecrated life (and for all of us, for that matter) being alone can be very dangerous for our spiritual life. The things we seek and the grace we try to live out, are things beyond our natural lives. We need the help, encouragement, and, even, correction of others in order for our faith and spiritual progress to not fall by the wayside.

Fr. Neumann found the help he needed in the Redemptorist. St. Alphonsus Ligouri had just been canonized. The mission of the Redemptorists, as envisioned by Alphonsus Ligouri, had been to go to the mountainous and out-of-the-way places where few, if any priests, ever ventured. They would serve the forgotten poor in the hinterlands. Well, Fr. Neumann saw this mission as a perfect fit for his own mission. In joining the Redemptorist, Fr. Neumann would receive all the spiritual, and physical, support he needed for the very mission he took on in coming to America.

In 1840, he entered the novitiate (the time of training of new members of a religious order) in Baltimore. As a novice, he learned the spiritual discipline of the order; as a priest, he traveled to places around Baltimore, and northern and western Maryland to minister to German speaking immigrants in these areas. As a novice in Baltimore, he himself would watch the German-speaking immigrants come off the boats. Later, he would minister to them in the churches they established around the State. The B&O Railroad was just being built. This new, and amazing, means of transportation would carry him to Western Maryland to the communities in and around Cumberland. An itinerary of his travels during this time could be a day trip any of us could make. The book does not make any reference to him coming to Gaithersburg or any place in Montgomery County. Maybe someone in the parish has done some research on this. Certainly, there were German-speaking Catholics in Upper Montgomery County. It is not too much of a stretch to imagine that Fr. Neumann ventured into this part of the State.

His time in Baltimore lasted only two years. But, his biographer considers it the best time Fr. Neumann's life. He had the consolation of a strong community life and the mission work he enjoyed so much. But, it was a very short time. I just came to the chapter where his novitiate training comes to an abrupt end. He is sent back to Pittsburgh to become the superior of the house there: to the smelly, crowded city where he would live in a cold, drafty factory converted to a religious house. His first reaction to being sent was to say "Why me? This other priest is much more suited to that position." But, then, he quickly came to the realization that he was the one chosen and he must obey as the Will of God.

Fr. Neumann's life is instructive to any priest, religious, or lay person. Many of us have felt a call from God to a particular state of life and a position within that state. We ask to know God's will then, when it is discerned, we can easily see that someone else would be better suited to the task. But, as we see so many times in scripture, God knows us better than we know ourselves. God's goal is our salvation and the salvation of the world. How we fit into that great work is beyond our understanding. The things we are called to do may very well aid someone's faith and salvation generations from now. Certainly, God had a particular plan for Fr. John Neumann. Could Fr. Neumann have guessed that a parish not far from where he lived would be named for him? Could he have guessed the people he would aid by his intercession? His ultimate call was to sainthood, the same call for all of us. Throughout the twists, turns, and frustrations of life, keep in mind that God has a plan for us, a plan for our personal salvation and a plan for the salvation of the world. If we seek holiness we will forward both plans in our lives. Remember also *Vae Soli*. We can't do it by ourselves. Our families, friends, and, above all, the people of our parish, are there to give us help, encouragement, and sometimes, correction as we seek holiness and God's Will in our lives.

**God bless,
Fr. LaHood**

Mark your calendars now ! The Installation of Fr. LaHood as our new Pastor will be celebrated by Archbishop Wuerl at the 9:30 am Sunday Mass on September 6th. All are invited.