



THE PASTOR'S DESK

August 9, 2009 - Lessons from the Life of Fr. Neumann (part 3)

Dear Parishioners,

I'm still making my way through the biography of St. John Neumann. As I said last week, its bedtime reading; a few pages and my heavy eyes tell me to turn off the light and go to sleep. I left off with Fr. Neumann being named the Superior of the Redemptorists in Pittsburgh. Well, it wasn't long before he got his wish of returning to Baltimore, albeit for a reason that he did not particularly like. He was named Superior of the Redemptorists in the United States! Here is a humble priest who wanted nothing more than to serve in obscurity in the wilderness. Now he's being given great responsibilities. Soon, he was flooded with all the administrative headaches that go with this responsibility: troublesome priests, parishes without money, demands from all over the country for priests to come and serve, appointments, raising money, writing and reading endless correspondences, etc. It seems he was now involved with all kinds of duties having nothing to do with being a priest. Fr. Neumann, of course, saw it all as God's will. He was still persevering in prayer and in performing his priestly work. He said Mass at St. Alphonsus' Church on Saratoga Street and heard the confessions for the various women's religious communities in Baltimore.

In 1851, Archbishop Eccleston of Baltimore passed away. Bishop Kenrick of Philadelphia was named to replace him. This left vacant the See of Philadelphia. Fr. Neumann had no inkling that he would be the next occupant of that office. When Archbishop Kenrick came to Baltimore he chose, of all people, Fr. John Neumann as his spiritual director. One day, while Fr. Neumann was seeing his spiritual son to the door, Archbishop Kenrick quipped that Fr. Neumann would be almost as tall as he with a mitre on his head. Fr. Neumann was shaken by this off-hand remark. Archbishops don't say such things idly. What also frightened Fr. Neumann was a vision one of the Redemptorist priests in Pittsburgh had in which Fr. Neumann appeared in his doorway dressed as a bishop.

Rumors went around the Redemptorists that Fr. Neumann would be named the new bishop of Philadelphia. He was desperate that this not happen. He even went to the Communities of Sisters and asked them to pray that "great harm not come to the Church in America." Unknown to the Sisters, that great harm was him being named

bishop. Perhaps, because of what did happen, the good Sister's prayers went in a different direction.

One morning, Fr. Neumann's brother Franz, a member of the Redemptorist, came to his door and found his brother prostrate on the ground. On his desk were the ring and pectoral cross, the signs of a bishop's office, given him by Archbishop Kenrick. Indeed, his worst fears were realized. He was named by the Pope as the new Bishop of Philadelphia. News of this appointment spread. People in Philadelphia responded with a simple question: "Who?" No one outside the Redemptorist circle had heard of him. On Passion Sunday 1852, Fr. Neumann became Bishop Neumann in the church of St. Alphonsus on Saratoga Street in Baltimore.

We again see John Neumann's humble acceptance of God's will. While many think that being a bishop is a great honor, those who are called to this office ought to have the reaction Fr. Neumann had: this is a tremendous responsibility that can only be carried out by complete dependence on God's grace.

There is one more section to the book, dealing with his time as Bishop of Philadelphia. So, more next week.

**God bless,
Fr. LaHood**

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Holy Days of Obligation are days of the year when Catholics must attend Mass in addition to the regular Sunday Mass. In the US, there are 6 Holy Days of Obligation: **January 1st**, Feast of Mary, Mother of God, **Ascension** (40 days after Easter Sunday), **August 15**, Feast of the Assumption, **November 1st**, All Saints' Day, **December 8th**, Feast of the Immaculate Conception and **December 25th**, Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas). If certain holy days fall on a Saturday or Monday, they are not considered holy days of obligation because they are back-to-back with Sunday. The only exception is Christmas and Immaculate Conception (patronal feast for the United States) which are always days of obligation even when they fall on Saturday or Monday. Ascension is sometimes moved to the closest Sunday. If in doubt, its best to call the parish or come to Mass anyway. Attending Mass is never a waste of time, even if it ends up not being a holy day of obligation. **The Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary is next Saturday. It is NOT a Holy Day of Obligation, this year. Mass at which we will celebrate her feast is on Saturday at 9:00 am. All are invited.**