



## THE PASTOR'S DESK

August 16, 2009 - Lessons from the Life of Fr. Neumann (part 4)

### Dear Parishioners,

One of the themes that comes out of St. John Neumann's life is "Vae Soli," accursed is the loner. Our perseverance in faith requires the help, support, example, and prayers of other people of faith. The highest expression of this support is a cultural atmosphere that supports and expresses the Catholic faith. John Neumann came from that kind of atmosphere. He came from a Catholic area of the Holy Roman Empire where daily life was imbued with the faith: every street corner had a statue of the Blessed Mother, there were crucifixes and shrines along the roads, processions in the street on feast days, church bells ringing, etc. America, though, was a predominantly Protestant country both in religion and culture. This made expressing and keeping the Catholic faith among the immigrants a difficult and constant task. It also made Catholics the object of suspicion.

Bishop Neumann looked with dismay as he traveled around his diocese and saw the people's religious observances waning for lack of the kind of expression and support it had in their old country. As bishop he traveled around all of Eastern Pennsylvania. Every year he went on a visitation trip that took him to many poor, remote towns in the coal mining regions. He would carry candy with him to give to children who answered catechism questions correctly. But, even more, he brought a true love of his people. These were the people he came to minister to, originally. He was pleased to be able to care for their souls. He bemoaned having to return to the "fleshpots" of Philadelphia. His episcopal residence in the upper-class neighborhood, though physically comfortable, was uncomfortable to him. As his lifestyle grew ever more privileged, he increased the rigors of his spiritual life: he not only prayed, but studied and wrote theology on his knees, he scourged himself every night, and he fasted ever more.

The other difficulty was the "Know Nothing" movement, a largely anti-immigrant (and so, anti-Catholic) movement. They watched the church closely to see what it was "up to." Early in his episcopacy, Bishop Neumann gave a major address in which he outlined the great need for

Catholic schools. This would help overcome the lack of cultural support for the faith as well as insure that the faith was passed on from generation to generation. In the audience was a spy from the "Know Nothings." Soon, there were posters and stories in the newspapers about how "Popery" was infiltrating Protestant America, how this foreign-born bishop was making sure that there would be generations of Catholics "educated" to follow the Pope blindly until the Church was ready to take over the country.

This was the atmosphere of the country during Bishop Neumann's time. The Church was publicly tolerated but there was great suspicion of what it was doing. Bishop Neumann persevered in his simple, humble way to lead the Church in his diocese and to make sure it had what it needed to survive and grow. Thanks to him, and many others, the Church in the United States is strong.

Unfortunately, there will always be suspicion of the Church. Because of our witness to the truths of our faith and, in particular, to our witness to the dignity of human life, people suspect that we are trying to force our faith onto others. Of course, our witness to the dictates of morality and human dignity are part of the natural law. All people of good will should be able to recognize their truth. Like Bishop Neumann, we are called to witness with humility and patience but also with dedication and faith, to the truths that come from God's creation. We are seeking not to force our religion on others, but to acknowledge the law written in the hearts of all men. This will lead to true peace and justice and to true freedom.

Let us pray to St. John Neumann for the strength to protect our country from the devil's influence. Ultimately, we can see this effort as true patriotism. Our country will survive and prosper only if it remains faithful to the truth of human dignity.

**God bless,  
Fr. LaHood**

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In celebration of the "Year of the Priest", please mark your calendars now for a play on October 6th at 7:00 pm in our church - "The Life of St. John Vianney." More details will be announced in coming bulletins.