



## THE PASTOR'S DESK

August 23, 2009 - Lessons from the Life of Fr. Neumann (conclusion)

### Dear Parishioners,

I have finally finished the little biography of St. John Neumann. I hope you have enjoyed these little reflections on the book and on his life. This will be the last installment, since the short book is a reflection of his short life. But, what a life it was. He was open to God's will throughout his life. God directed his life to places he could never have imagined (or even desired). The last few years of his life bring this home.

In 1854, he (and all bishops throughout the world) received an invitation from Pope Pius IX to attend a ceremony for the declaration of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In December of that year, Bishop Neumann found himself in Rome. He had a private audience with the Pope. He described to the Holy Father the need for more churches, schools and convents. The Pope told him to start a new order of Sisters under the rule of St. Francis. On December 8<sup>th</sup>, the ceremony was held in St. Peter's Basilica. The Pope, seated on his throne, read the declaration from the text held in front of him by one of the bishop. That man was none other than the diminutive bishop of Philadelphia, John Neumann.

He was able to pass through his home town of Prachatz. He visited his elderly father and was able to visit the grave of his mother, offering Mass for her in his home parish church. He received a huge reception in his home town. No one could have guessed that as not-yet-ordained Herr Neumann left for America to work in the mission fields he would return someday as a bishop.

Back in America, he went to one of the Council's of Baltimore. He longed to return to the working people in Western Pennsylvania. The only way he could see this happening would be if the Diocese of Philadelphia were divided with the creation of a new Diocese. He proposed at the Council of Baltimore that a request be made to the Holy Father to divide Pennsylvania into two dioceses with the seat of the new diocese in Pottsville. He then asked that he be named the bishop of Pottsville! John Neumann didn't think, or even care, that people would consider a transfer from Philadelphia to Pottsville a demotion. He knew what he wanted to do. Well, no such division occurred during Bishop Neumann's lifetime.

That lifetime was to be cut short. 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.

**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 information will be announced in coming bulletins.