

October 7, 2007
3:00 P.M. Mass of Thanksgiving
Establishment of Saint John Neumann Parish
Given by: Rev. Thomas J. Protack, Founding Pastor

Your Excellency, Bishop Saltarelli, my brother priests and deacons, men and women in consecrated life, seminarians, public officials and other distinguished guests, my family and my parish family; it is an honor for me to preach today as the founding pastor of Saint John Neumann Parish.

In preparation for this wonderful day, Fr. Pileggi and I visited our school last week and the students were thrilled to be part of today's celebration. They were asking lots of questions about St. John Neumann, what it means to be a parish and if was I excited about being named "The Founding Pastor?" As we were leaving, a little boy asked me a question "My grandmother said that since you are the founding pastor, you get to be buried outside in the front of church? Is that true?" I am not sure how to respond to that question; we might have to consult the bishop for the correct answer!

Bishop Saltarelli, it is a pure joy to have you here with us today, as together with our brother priests and God's People, we celebrate the establishment of Saint John Neumann Parish, the 58th and newest parish in the Diocese of Wilmington. When you came to shepherd our Diocese over 11 years ago, you commissioned a study to recommend key areas for the future growth of our schools and parishes to spread the gospel message of Christ.

Five years ago, you dedicated Most Blessed Sacrament Catholic School as a strong sign of Catholic Christian values in our community and you brought that Vision to Life! Your personal choice of naming our school after the Eucharist sends a clear message of who we are and what is most important to us! One of the last recommendations on the list of your strategic plan and study, #10, was "to establish Saint John Neumann as its own parish."

In our first reading today the Lord responded to the prophet Habakkuk who had been waiting for a long time: "the vision will come in time and will not disappoint, wait for it; it surely will come!" Bishop Saltarelli, the time has come and is here! The People of God of this great parish are not disappointed but filled with joy today. We blend our voices with the psalmist and sing "This day was made by the Lord, let us rejoice; let us be glad!"

We gather today to celebrate life in abundance. We gather to celebrate as a parish with over 1600 families under the patronage of Saint John Neumann. We look to him; we pray for his intercession that we might continue the good work he began in our church here in the United States.

A bishop for 8 years in Philadelphia, of which this land was a part of his responsibility, standing only 5 feet, 4 inches, St. John Neumann was able to do great things that still stand out in our lives. He was responsible for building over 80 churches, one a month and 40 parochial schools where attendance swelled from an initial 500 to over 9,000! He cared for the sick, the poor, and spread the devotion of 40 hours of adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

He was ordained a bishop on Palm Sunday and chose as his Episcopal motto, "Passion of Christ, Strengthen me." As you entered church today, you might have noticed that you passed under those same words emblazoned above our entrance doors!" May these words of our patron saint ring true in our hearts and lives not only today, but every day of our lives and every time each of us enters into this sacred place to celebrate the Sacraments. That flame of the Holy Spirit that Saint Paul speaks about in his letter to Timothy today, must be kept burning brightly as now the torch is passed onto each of us.

Our children deserve the very best in Religious Education and the opportunity to participate in Catholic education. I believe there is no coincidence that our Most Blessed Sacrament School is here on the same grounds as our parish named after Saint John Neumann who began it all so long ago and had that deep love for the Eucharist, the Most Blessed Sacrament. Our families should be afforded countless opportunities to draw closer to the Lord and to others through vibrant ministries.

As founding pastor, along with Fr. Pileggi and with the help of our parish leadership, I believe our task is to look into the future and to see things not as they are, but what they can become! As our Holy Father Pope Benedict reminds us, together, we will walk this new journey as co-workers in the truth insisting that the gospel message be spread and the Eucharist be shared. In his great reflections on charity, the Holy Father reminds all of us that the Church exists to educate people in love and to bring them to spiritual maturity. The Church exists to help people discover concretely in every day life the meaning of the word love, and to help people arrive at mature love. And if we want to find love, we must find Christ and bring others to Him. We must heed the words of Saint Paul today, and truly "guard this rich trust with the help of the Holy Spirit."

Let us build together and remember that we cannot lay a foundation other than the one that has been laid, namely, Jesus Christ. And my dear friends in Christ, when we have done all we have been asked to do, we repeat the words of this Sunday's gospel, "we are unprofitable servants; we have done what we are obliged to do." Let the words from the Third Eucharist Prayer ring true in our hearts and lives,

"Strengthen in faith and love our pilgrim church on earth; your servant Pope Benedict, our bishop Michael, and all the bishops with the clergy and the entire people your Son has gained for you!"

Please pray for me today, as I serve as your shepherd, your pastor. Help me by your prayers and support to model the Good Shepherd by entering more fully into His life and His love.

Pray that I come to know Him better and love Him in an even greater way, so that I can daily entrust my life totally to Him.

During this month of our Our Lady and the Most Holy Rosary, may Mary, the Mother of God, lead me to her Son and help me lead others to Him through her prayerful and powerful intercession.

Passion of Christ; strengthen us. Saint John Neumann, pray for us!

Rev. Thomas J. Protack