

**Remarks of Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State
at the dinner commemorating the Centenary of
the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**

***Baltimore, Maryland
12 November 2017***

Dear Brother Bishops,

Before all else, I wish to renew the Holy Father's cordial good wishes for this anniversary, together with the assurance of his prayers for each of you and for all those associated with the work of your Conference. I thank Cardinal DiNardo, Archbishop Gomez and Cardinal Dolan for inviting me to share in the joy of this celebration, as a sign of our communion *cum et sub Petro* and our unity in the Catholic faith that comes to us from the Apostles.

The establishment of your assembly one hundred years ago was in some sense prophetic, since it foreshadowed the development of episcopal conferences as an institute of canon law meant to promote and coordinate the pastoral activity of local Churches. Born of a practical charitable outreach to those suffering the effects of the First World War, it rapidly became a means of practical cooperation in service of the apostolate and of fostering affective communion among the bishops of this country and, in a particular way, with the Successor of Peter.

Tonight I would like simply to recall the message of encouragement that the Holy Father addressed to you during your meeting last year. He noted that the great challenge that we face is *"to create a culture of encounter, which encourages individuals and groups to share the richness of our traditions and experiences, to break down walls and to build bridges. The Church in America, as elsewhere, is called to 'go out' from its comfort zone and to be a leaven of communion. Communion among ourselves, with our fellow Christians, and with all who seek a future of hope"*.

It is my hope and prayer that this anniversary will strengthen your communion and common resolve in rising to this challenge. The

accomplishments of the past century were the fruit of *a unity of faith and evangelical vision* that made it possible for the Church in the United States to become a prophetic voice for social justice and human development, not only at home but also worldwide. I think not only of your historic defense of the rights of immigrants, laborers and women, but also of your consistent witness to the inalienable right to life of the unborn. I think as well of the outstanding charitable outreach of America's Catholic community that found institutional expression in the establishment of Catholic Relief Services and the Campaign for Human Development, as well as in any number of other programs of assistance and care for those in need.

In this time of epochal change, that same spirit of unity is more than ever necessary, in order to confront with creativity and conviction the realities of a rapidly changing world and the task of the new evangelization. In this regard, allow me to repeat the charge that Pope Francis laid before you during his Pastoral Visit to the United States: "*The path ahead is dialogue among yourselves, dialogue with your presbyterates, dialogue with lay persons, dialogue with families, dialogue with society*". Only through the unity that is forged from dialogue and encounter will you find the wisdom to rise to the challenges of the coming century with the courage and farsightedness that marked your predecessors in the century that is now ending.

With these words of encouragement, I thank you once again for your gracious invitation and I assure you of my prayers for you and for your ministry in the service of Christ's flock in the United States. Together with the Holy Father's deep gratitude for the traditional devotion of America's Catholics to the Successor of Peter and for their generous solidarity in his universal ministry, I have the honor to convey his Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ.