

Presidential Address
(November 2024)

Your Eminence Cardinal Pierre,
Your Eminences,
Archbishop Lori,
Dear Brother Bishops,
Sisters and Brothers all,

In the Office of Readings from the Latin American breviary, the Book of Maccabees is proposed in these days. It recalls the fidelity of the Chosen People in a time of oppression, forced assimilation, and rule by a foreign power. The fidelity of a small group was sufficient to ensure a temporary victory over the oppressors, but more importantly the preservation and handing on of the Jewish faith to the next generations right up to our time.

Of course, the historic situation was not without confusion, the weakness of some, and the leadership of others. The notion of fidelity and the transmission of the faith are dear to believers and us as successors of the Apostles. They are characteristics of this time of mission for the Church in the United States of America.

Thoughts of the Eucharistic Congress come readily to mind. That moment of unity and celebration of the Lord's real presence in our midst was certainly a high point. People still talk about their experience in Indianapolis and give thanks for the initiative. It was a high point of this time of Eucharistic revival that continues now in its phase of mission. To quote St. Paul VI: "For it is only in the Christian message that modern man can find the answer to his questions and the energy for his commitment of human solidarity."¹

We continue the mission to proclaim our faith in the Eucharist, to help the faithful discover or deepen its meaning, and to prolong the positive effects of the first two years of the Eucharistic revival. I know that we will have an opportunity to consider this important process during our days together.

As the Nuncio reminded us, the Church has just completed a three year synodal process on "communion, participation, and mission." Together pastors and faithful have gathered together in prayer, listened to each other, and produced a final document, which the Bishop of Rome has made his own.

Many of the synodal exercises that are common in our Country wait to be introduced elsewhere. Parish councils, finance councils both parochial and diocesan, presbyteral councils, the college of consultors, the National Advisory Committee, and so forth are not universally employed in the Church. Some synod participants were surprised at how common those instances are in our nation. Even our Conference has tried to introduce a more synodal style in our plenary assemblies with the opening day of listening to the Lord in prayer, the moments of fraternal dialogue, and increased opportunities to hear one another. In your name I thank Bishop Perry for his opening reflections for us.

¹ St. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 3.

As stated last year, that is not to say that we do not have substantial work before us. It is not easy to listen and to set aside the campaign positions that sometimes colored the approaches of certain participants. There is still an occasional sentiment that if I do not get what I want, the Church is not being synodal. We have to grow in our understanding and in our ability to listen to the Holy Spirit.

As the final document reminds us, “From baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit springs forth the identity of the People of God. [That identity] is activated as a call to holiness and a sending forth in mission to invite all people to welcome the gift of salvation (cf. Mt. 28:18-9). It is thus from baptism in which Christ clothes us anew in Him (cfr. Gal 3,27) and makes us reborn from the Spirit (cf. Gv 3,5-6) as children of God, that the synodal missionary Church is born. The whole Christian life has its source and its horizon in the mystery of the Trinity, which awakens in us the dynamism of the faith, of hope, and of love.”²

As Pope Francis said before his formal remarks, it will take time to probe the richness of this experience and permeate our activities with the fruits of the synod on synodality. The call to holiness and the mission are life-long activities. They require a powerful beginning, but also the sustained willingness to keep to the course and follow through. Or as my first nuncio told me: “you need much patience, because a little is not enough.”

We have just experienced national elections and now is the time to encourage all to work together like the instruments in a concert. There very capable musicians use their talents under direction to make a harmonious melody. Pope Francis characterizes the presence and action of the Holy Spirit as harmony. We all know that it is difficult to convince people to work together and embrace the common good.

The virtues are good teachers and the community of faith is called to live virtuously so as to instill authentic values into our society. It is not easy, but it is not impossible.

As the Successors of the Apostles and Vicars of Christ in our dioceses, we never back-pedal or renounce the clear teaching of the Gospel. We proclaim it in and out of season. We must insist on the dignity of the human person from womb to tomb, be unstinting in our commitment, as I said yesterday, to see Christ in those who are most in need, to defend and lift up the poor, and to encourage immigration reform, while we continue to care for those in need who cross our borders. We certainly do not encourage illegal immigration, but we will all have to stand before the Throne of Grace and hear the Lord ask us if we saw Him in the hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, stranger, or sick (cf. Mt. 25:31ff) and responded to His needs.

At the same time, we must encourage people to work together, to listen to each other, and in disagreement never to forget that the other is created in the image and likeness of God and is, therefore, worthy of respect. We redouble our efforts to introduce civility into the everyday discourse. Christians should be catalysts for a more humane and worthy approach to daily life. Nothing is truly ordinary, because it is open to be touched by divine grace.

We try to contribute to a healing of the divisions in our society by our efforts, teaching, and, especially, example. I always remind those I confirm that the Christian faith spread in earlier times, because those looking at Christians were impressed by their love for one another. The same should be true today.

² Documento Finale of the 21-24 Synod, 15.

No one is blind to the negative impact of certain elements of popular culture. Already 31 years ago, St. John Paul II told us: “Man’s capacity to know the truth is also darkened, and his will to submit to it is weakened. Thus, giving himself over to relativism and scepticism (cf. *Jn* 18:38), he goes off in search of an illusory freedom apart from truth itself.³ We are charged to preach the truth that sets everyone free. We must be undaunted and eager to proclaim that truth in love with all of the means at our disposal.

The Sunday before the General Elections I spoke at the St. Thomas More Center at Yale University on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. As you can imagine, presenting that document on the eve of election day obliged me to reread very carefully our teaching including the most recent introductory note. It is a very thorough presentation of the Catholic outlook on public life and the issues that face us. While we will begin work to bring it up to date, we can take just satisfaction in the teaching that was offered.

While we may not be able to do much about the world situation, we pray earnestly for peace in Europe, the Holy Land, parts of Africa and Asia. I know that many of us have responded to the humanitarian challenges in Ukraine, Gaza, and elsewhere. With my own eyes I saw what the Knights of Columbus were doing on the ground in Ukraine and I am glad that we will have an opportunity to listen to Supreme Knight, Captain Patrick Kelly tells us about other initiatives from the largest society of lay men in the Church today. What was born of concrete needs for widows in the 19th century still serves today for formation, charitable action, and authentic patriotism.

I began reflecting on the situation of our elder brothers and sisters in faith at the time of the Maccabees. Persecution is not so overt in contemporary society, but we are still alert and eager to keep the faith and to teach it authentically to others. May our time together be rich in fraternity, productive in work, and exemplary in our synodal dialogue. Thank you.

³ St. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 1