

Presidential Address of Archbishop Broglio

Your Eminence, Cardinal Pierre,
Archbishop Lori,
Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in Christ,
Sisters and Brothers,

Let my first words in this final presidential address to you be those of profound gratitude for your support and for the abiding unity experienced on a daily basis from the prelates who form this Conference. I knew that we were united, but that fraternity has been so tangible in the more trying moments of these past three years. I am profoundly grateful.

Your confidence in asking me to serve in this role will make me forever grateful. I will not be less than frank, however. I rejoice that the term is only three years and not renewable. *Taps*, heard so frequently on Memorial Day, promises quiet and reminds us that God is near. On this Veterans Day, I am happy to think about joining other veterans of this office.

At the same time, I will not soon forget the lessons learned over these three years. My first visit as President of this Conference was to war-torn Ukraine. The senseless devastation and the earnest hope of that noble Nation remains etched on my heart. Archbishop Lori has also visited there and represented us in the Holy Land, as well. Those opportunities to express the solidarity of the Church in the United States are precious indeed.

I have also learned, and mentioned it to Pope Leo last month, that some of our faithful listen more readily to sound bytes, the sirens of political discourse, or whatever confirms their conclusions and partisan leanings than they are to hearing their pastors and us. The ease of sending an e-mail has diminished common courtesy and, if I may be so bold, even common sense. Our task, as unworthy successors of the Apostles, is to proclaim the truth in and out of season, reaffirm the dignity of the human person, and find ways to make the Gospel resound at the very least in the hearts of believers, if not from shore to shore. It is not easy and it will not become easier.

Lack of ease, however, has never been a reason to take one's hand off the plow, water down the message, or become discouraged. After all, we "have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood."¹ Furthermore, we are graced to be living during a Jubilee Year of hope. The late Pope Francis encouraged us by saying: "This interplay of hope and patience makes us see clearly that the Christian life is a journey calling for moments

¹ Heb. 12:4b.

of greater intensity to encourage and sustain hope as the constant companion that guides our steps towards the goal of our encounter with the Lord Jesus.”²

Just a few lines later in that same bull of indiction for the Holy Year, he praises the Eastern Churches for their steadfast fidelity in the face of persecution. We recognize how blessed we are to be breathing with both “lungs” thanks to our shared oneness in the leadership and collaboration of the Bishops who form Region XV. If there is a temptation to be provincial, they widen our horizons and immerse the rest of us in the richness of their theology.

We are challenged in the XXI century to keep that goal of an encounter with Jesus Christ uppermost in our minds and in those of the people we are privileged to serve. Our world is so centered on the present moment and catering to individual needs that it is difficult to insist on the notion of pilgrimage. Despite the popularity of the “Camino”, the contemporary person is stuck here and lifts his or her gaze to the final things with great difficulty.

We challenge those we are privileged to serve with the message of eternal life—not as an escape, but rather as a goal, the one end that is always important. When I worked in the Apostolic Palace I enjoyed rather frequent opportunities to stick my head into an empty Sistine Chapel before the Vatican Museums were open. The vivid images of the Michelangelo’s Last Judgment always captured my attention. I have thought about those images frequently as I issued a few reminders to interlocutors to remember that Jesus already told us the “exam” questions for the Final Judgment. There is no room for doubt and the preparation is daily.

Jesus identifies with the hungry, thirsty, helpless unborn, stranger, naked, homeless, and prisoner. He assures us that we meet Him in those others. It should surprise no one when we defend the unborn, meet the basic needs of the immigrant, lobby for immigration reform, reach out to those in need outside our borders through CRS, and call upon others to do the same. Repeatedly in the Old Testament, as well, the Chosen People were admonished to have a special care for strangers, aliens, and sojourners. It is not rocket science, but the Word of God. In a weak, ill-advised moment I responded to an irate e-mail and suggested that my interlocutor read Matthew 25. The response came swiftly: I should read the Catechism.

How can it be that someone would actually believe that the Gospel and the Catechism do not agree and give the same message? Our work is cut out for us and much remains to be done. We must also convince people to listen to each other. May the lessons learned through the synod spread throughout society so that we might take the time to listen to the other, and if we must disagree to do so with courtesy, appropriate speech, and even attentiveness to the personal situation of the other. We have to draw

² Pope Francis, *Spes non confundit*, 5.

on our unity to illustrate that civil discourse is not only possible, but the most authentically human way forward.

There is a comprehensible nostalgia for the Catholic ghetto in which many of us came of age, but to return there would be to deny our mission to evangelize by making the Gospel come alive. Together we are committed to the great line from the document of Aparecida: : “To know Jesus is the best gift that any person can receive; for us to have met Him is the best thing to have happened in our lives and to make Him known through our words and deeds is our joy.”³

Certainly, the hurricane that devastated Jamaica, did further harm to Haiti, and wielded damage to Cuba will bring out the best in our faithful. They will respond and will offer important, generous assistance. However, should that not always be our attitude? We have so much, can we not share it with others? Of course, the same is also true at home. I was shocked to learn that 42 million people are dependent on assistance from SNAP. In a country of such wealth and such possibilities, we should be able to do better so that all are able to share in the bounty of this land.

In that regard, the Franciscans of the Holy Land have asked me to appeal to your generosity in fostering assiduous growth in the participation in the annual collection for the Holy Land. The need there is extreme and the war in Gaza has only exacerbated the suffering for the dwindling Christian population in the land where Jesus walked. “The Custos has reported that several hundred families have left their homes in Bethlehem alone due to the feelings of hopelessness – no work, a hostile political environment and no signs of positive change.”⁴

The Good Friday collection does much to assist the work of the Franciscans in the maintenance of the Holy Places and of the “living stones,” the Christians living around them. In my past experience as Chairman of our Committee on International Justice and Peace, I twice joined the Holy Land Coordination for a visit to those “stones”. The last time I celebrated Mass in Holy Family Church in Gaza and afterwards we, the members of the coordination, visited the homes of the Catholic families. I am sure that little is left.

It is incumbent on us to help offering the means to offer jobs and education, medical and other charitable support, and – most of all – hope to our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land. Please do what you can to bolster the Good Friday Collection and to send it quickly to the Franciscans for distribution where it is needed the most.

Finally, allow me to conclude where I began with a word of thanks to you, my bother Bishops for your unity, confidence, and support, especially as I was stretched to speak for all of us in defense of the unborn, the stranger, and the poor. Seldom have I experienced such less than constructive criticism. However, the guidance of the Holy

³ DA 29.

⁴ David Grenier, OFM, letter to Archbishop Broglio.

Spirit has also been very clear. Bishop Seitz and I sat in a café last month in the Eternal City and reflected on how the Gospel led us to surprising roles.

Sentiments of gratitude also well up regarding the Nuncio. Your Eminence, even if I never served in a country as large as this one, I do understand the demands of your office and have appreciated the ease of communication with you—even when we did not share the same viewpoint. Your closeness, to use a word dear to the Secretariat of State, has made collaboration a joy. At least the next President of the Conference will not have the “baggage” of having served as a Nuncio.

Archbishop Lori has been a source of USCCB experience and wise counsel. Father Fuller has been patient and amazingly efficient. He is also assisted by a competent and willing staff. I am very grateful for their help and we can be justly proud of the work that they do for all of us and their commitment to serve the mission of the Church in preaching the Gospel.

Above all, I thank the Lord for His steadfast presence and guidance as together we seek the Kingdom of God and strive to guide those whose pastoral care is entrusted to us to the same life without end. To God be glory now and forever.