

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
IMPOSITION OF THE PALLIUM UPON HIS EXCELLENCY SHELTON FABRE
FIFTH ARCHBISHOP OF LOUISVILLE
CATHEDRAL OF THE ASSUMPTION
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY
SEPTEMBER 20, 2022

Your Excellencies, Fathers, Religious, Seminarians and Members of the People of God, Distinguished members of the government, Brothers and Sisters,

At the beginning of this Eucharistic celebration, I had the duty and privilege of imposing the pallium upon Archbishop Shelton Fabre, the fifth archbishop of this beloved Archdiocese of Louisville. Today, we gather in this Cathedral of the Assumption to celebrate the Memorial of St. Andrew Kim, the first Korean priest and his companions, all of whom were martyred and most of whom were lay people. We have an opportunity to come together as the People of God in this Province of Louisville, gathered from many dioceses, parishes and families, to reflect upon the different meanings of the pallium received by an archbishop.

The pallium is a piece of fabric woven with lamb's wool, which Pope Francis blessed and gave to Archbishop Fabre this year on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. It is simple yet has great meaning. It reminds the Metropolitan Archbishop and the faithful that the particular vocation and mission of every Bishop is none other than to be a Good Shepherd: a shepherd who places his sheep upon his shoulders, carries, guides, cares for, and leads him to the source of living water.

The pallium is a sign of the essential and concrete dimension of being a Good Shepherd in a Metropolitan Church which seeks to promote, maintain and enhance the fraternal and effective communion of the Pastors of the Province among themselves; between the bishops and the faithful; and, of the bishops and the faithful with the Successor of Saint Peter and the whole Church. In brief, this is what the pallium should say to the archbishop and to the People of God.

Archbishop Fabre has big shoes to fill, following Archbishop Kurtz who used his gifts to build up unity in the Province and beyond, serving as President of the Episcopal Conference. However, now the task has fallen to Archbishop Fabre, who is the heir to that great pioneer and missionary bishop, Bishop Benedict Flaget, who shepherded this territory when it was wilderness.

Perhaps, in this changed and secularized culture, this land seems once again like missionary territory, not only because Catholics are a distinct minority in this Province, but also because of the growing number of people who have never heard of Christ or who are openly hostile to him. The Holy Father wants us to be a missionary Church, one that goes forth – unarmed, except with the gift of faith and the words of the Gospel. Nevertheless, one must lead. Archbishop Fabre has been chosen to lead, to strengthen, and to build up this Province, losing himself for the sake of Christ and His Church.

He has a good example also in Saint Andrew Kim, whose father was also martyred. After baptism at age 15, Andrew traveled 1300 miles to receive training to be a priest in Macao and after many years was able to return to his country. He was ordained a priest in Shanghai and, returning to his country, he

arranged for more missionaries to enter Korea through a water route, so as to evade a border patrol which sought to prevent the missionaries from entering. Eventually, he was discovered, tortured, and beheaded near the Han River near Seoul. He spent his life as a missionary to his own people and have his life as a witness to Christ.

In today's Gospel, we heard about the coming of the Cross – the “imposition” of the Cross – in the life of every believer: *“If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, and but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”*

Archbishop Fabre has had the pallium “imposed” upon him. It will remind him of the Cross by which Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gave His life for the sheep. Jesus would say: *“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep.”* (John 10:10) Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and the bishops of the Church should be living reminders that *God is with us* even in moments of trial.

Jesus saves God's people by giving His life for his sheep. He offered Himself freely and fully as an acceptable sacrifice upon the Cross. This is what it means to be a “Good Shepherd”: to give life, to offer one's life in sacrifice for everyone: for you, for me, for every man and woman!

In the Ancient Near East, kings often styled themselves as shepherds of the people, disposing of them according to their will. How different is the Shepherd of our humanity, who became a lamb – led to slaughter – to redeem us! The Good Shepherd is willing to give the most precious gift – His very life!

The Lord desired that His service of love might be carried on until the end of time. Through his own free initiative, he called some men to be with Him, to follow, obey, and love Him – to be Shepherds of His People. After His Resurrection, Jesus appeared to Simon Peter, giving him the task of a shepherd: *“Feed my sheep.”* (cf. John 21:17). This task was made a permanent reality in the choice of the successors of the Apostles, the bishops, who are called by Christ to be good shepherds.

The Second Vatican Council teaches that *“By divine institution the bishops are the successors of the Apostles as shepherds of the Church.”* (LG, 20) This gives particular correspondence between the words of Jesus – *I am the Good Shepherd* – and His decision to choose some men to be Shepherds in the Church.

Again, the Council states: *“In the bishops, for whom priests are assistants, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme High Priest, is present in the midst of those who believe. ... Through their excellent service He is preaching the word of God to all nations and constantly administering the sacraments of faith to those who believe ... These pastors, chosen to shepherd the Lord's flock of the elect, are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”* (Lumen Gentium, 21)

Shepherd of the Flock. Servant of Christ. Steward of the Mysteries of God. This is the bishop, but he is also teacher, priest, head, friend, and brother. Others have called him “the angel of his church.” The bishop as angel is a strange and surprising image, but it helps us understand the vocation and mission of the bishop.

Why is he called an angel? An angel is one who “protects”, who “visits”, who “counsels”, who “points toward heaven.” His function, as the prayer of the Guardian Angel says, is *to light, to guard, to rule, and to guide* the children of God. These words capture well the responsibilities and the mission of the bishop. Undoubtedly, they are tied to the virtues of *fortitude, justice, prudence, and temperance.*

The bishop “*lights*” or enlightens, through his teaching and example; this demands that he act, using the virtue of *fortitude*. His mission is to lead the community, with the heart of the Good Shepherd, firm in truth and love, always seeking the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

The bishop *guards*; here he must act with *justice*. He guards the “Holy Church, the spouse of Christ” and the Body of Christ, of which each baptized person is a member. He procures their true good, giving special attention and care to those members who are weakest in the faith, and even the sheep that are still outside the fold. He guards the deposit of faith, helping the flock walk safely in the path of truth.

He *rules* the Church with the virtue of *prudence* that comes from being with his sheep – “in front, in the middle, and behind them” – offering his example, listening to their voices and prudently discerning, fostering communion, confronting challenges, and contributing to the search for solutions without neglecting the truth.

The bishop *guides* and governs, practicing the virtue of *temperance*, directing and accompanying the life of the Church with a spirit of humility, patience and love; promoting initiatives that contribute to the vitality of the faith, while being vigilant, like a shepherd, over the forms of pastoral activity and the use of Church goods.

The Second Vatican Council also considers the bishop in his relationship with other bishops, as a member of an “episcopal college” – within a group of bishops – who share in the life and concern for all the churches. Thus, the Church can be considered not only as a Diocese, with its own Bishop as head, but also as an Ecclesiastical Province, with an Archbishop as its leader.

The pallium is a reminder and call to communion of all the Shepherds who belong to an Archdiocese or Province. The Shepherd of a Metropolitan Church is a constant force for encouraging effective and affective communion at all levels of the Church. This idea of ecclesial communion is of fundamental importance for all the faithful: it provides a real opportunity to live communion with all the other bishops, with the Pope as the head, and consequently, to live and reinforce the spiritual bond, in love, with the whole Church of Christ.

The vocation and mission of an Archbishop is both challenging and rewarding. At its core, it helps people realize that in the hands of God, everything is different. In faith, we realize, through our shepherds, that placing ourselves in the hands of God and living in communion with Jesus Christ is more than something merely human; that the Church is the family of God that lives mercy, love, and communion; that the family of God is permanently sent, called to go forth proclaiming the joy of the Gospel, and showing the tenderness of the God who is the friend and shepherd of each person, without exception, and who came so that each person may have life and life eternal.

To Archbishop Fabre, I say: Take courage! In the name of the Lord, very consciously and with firm and growing faith, trust, love and *parrhesia*, sustained by the Holy Spirit, joining your hands, will, and heart to those of your brother Bishops of your suffragan dioceses, move forward, offering to the sheep of Christ “*the most effective and authentic witness, which is one that does not contradict by behavior or lifestyle, what is preached with the word and taught to others!*” (HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS, 29 JUNE 2015)

May the Mother of Jesus, whose birth we celebrate this day, accompany you and this Archdiocese, sustaining and supporting your service and pastoral ministry. Through her intercession may she obtain for our brothers in the episcopacy, priests, consecrated persons and laity of this Ecclesiastical Province, the

renewed grace and strength that will help us to live with courage, in fidelity and joy, our vocations as disciples, missionaries, and apostles, in the journey of faith that leads to the Father's house! May the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd of our lives, bless you always and abundantly! Amen.