

LESSONS OF THE LAMBS: “IN COMMUNION WITH ROME”

It's a safe bet that the sartorial habits of bishops are not high on many people's lists of interesting topics of discussion. Perhaps this weekend might be an exception. In a new custom instituted by Pope Francis, the pallium, a white woolen band worn across the shoulders embroidered with six black crosses and traditionally beset with three gemmed pins, will be conferred upon Archbishop Bernard Hebda by the Papal Nuncio to the United States, **Archbishop Christophe Pierre**. Why is this significant? Some of the earliest liturgical books from Rome detail the use of this ecclesiastical garment, the earliest mention being when Pope St. Marcus conferred the pallium on a bishop in the port city of Ostia in the 4th century. In ancient Rome, the pallium was a cloak that replaced the toga, and was worn by high-ranking citizens and civil officials. Later, its use became more uniform, so that by the 6th century its use was considered to be a long established custom. It did then, and does now, symbolize communion between the See of Peter and the man who serves as Metropolitan Archbishop of an Ecclesiastical Province. An ecclesiastical province usually comprises several dioceses (called suffragans) grouped under the leadership of an Archbishop. For a time, some ancient frescoes show it to be much larger, more like a scarf that wrapped around the neck and fell to knee level on one side. Pope Benedict XVI resurrected this for a couple of years, but its heavy weight became burdensome and he reverted to the simpler one.

According to Canon Law (canon 437), a metropolitan must request the pallium within three months of his appointment and may wear it only in the territory of his own diocese and in the other dioceses of his ecclesiastical province. Years ago, I recall attending a Mass in Sioux Falls, SD for a gathering of members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, an organization of laity and clergy dedicated to the support of Christians in the Holy Land. While collecting our belongings after Mass, a young priest from another state made a strikingly dismissive comment that our Archbishop should review the rubrics, as he ought not be wearing the pallium while offering Mass in another diocese. I followed up with a polite letter, citing canon 437: “A metropolitan can use the pallium according to the norm of liturgical laws within any church of the ecclesiastical province over which he presides, but not outside it, even if the diocesan bishop gives his assent.” I added, “Might you be aware of any other sources that could shed light on this question?” Funny thing, the young priest never responded.

The customs associated with the production of the pallium are delightful. Several years ago, I witnessed the annual ceremony at the Basilica of **Sant'Agnese Fuori le Mura** (St. Agnes Outside the Walls) in Rome. On the Feast of Saint Agnes (January 21), two little lambs are carried in on platters surrounded by flowers, one red, the other white. The flowers symbolize Agnes' twofold martyrdom of blood and virginity. The word “cute” does not even begin to describe the scene as they are processed in much to the delight of the children and adults alike. While quiet at first, about the time of the homily they seemed to perk up! (Shhh, I think they're sedated!) I smiled throughout the Mass, as they made delightful bleats, followed by a muted chorus of chuckles from the congregation. As I recall, following the homily they were whisked away to the Vatican in a motorcade for the second blessing, this one by the Pope himself. **Talk about a pampered life!** From these very lambs comes the wool from which the sisters of St. Caecilia in Trastevere produce the pallia. Now you see how the symbolism takes shape. The Archbishop is truly our shepherd and wearing a woolen band around one's shoulders highlights this role in a tangible way.

Locally, **Archbishop John Ireland** was our first shepherd to receive the pallium. It was his predecessor, Bishop Thomas Grace, who bestowed it to him on Thursday September 27, 1888 at our third Cathedral. A newly ordained priest returning from studies in Rome was consigned to carry the pallium to New York as its first courier. I'll bet he never let it out of his sight on his voyage across the Atlantic! From there, Ireland's friend Bishop John Keane (rector of the new Catholic University in Washington, D.C.) transported it in August to the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, IN, where he was traveling for the golden jubilee of the founder of Notre Dame, Fr. Edward Sorin. Ireland also attended the celebration, and Keane presented it to him at the banquet that evening. From there, Ireland brought it himself to Saint Paul. Too bad FedEx did not exist— it would have been much simpler!

The morning edition of the **Saint Paul Globe** warned “three times as many tickets have been issued as the church will accommodate.” Oops—awkward! It cautioned that “pew holders will have no more rights or privileges than others. The ushers will seat the people as they come, and will do everything in their power to please all.” Saint Julian the Hospitaller, patron of ushers, intercede for us! The procession of clergy began at the Archbishop’s residence. Bishop Keane preached the homily at the solemn Pontifical Mass. A reception followed at the Ryan Hotel (6th and Robert St.), the city’s finest Victorian Gothic digs, complete with private bathrooms! In 1888, this event signaled that the newly minted **Archdiocese** of Saint Paul had truly “arrived,” having come a long way from a log Cathedral in 1851. Today our province comprises the States of Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Today’s much simpler celebration is appropriate given the priority of servant leadership in the Church today, and our current situation. Still, we ought to rejoice in this visible bond with the See of Peter and take the opportunity to thank the Holy Father through his Nuncio for sending us a true shepherd after the heart of Jesus.

- **Bienvenue à la Cathédrale de Saint Paul, Monseigneur Christophe Pierre!** We offer a warm word of welcome to Archbishop Pierre, the Holy Father’s representative to the United States, upon the occasion of today’s Pallium Mass. We are also expecting a number of visiting bishops from our Province. All are invited to attend the 2:30 p.m. Mass— a reception follows in Hayden Hall.
- A heartfelt thanks to all who turned out to help clean our church in preparation for Christmas. I truly rely upon your help— we can accomplish so much when many turn out. It is wonderful to see such a spotless church— even if the first snowstorm brings in sand and salt!
- Our Christmas Schedule is printed in today’s bulletin. Both our new LED Cornice and East Rose Window lighting will debut on Christmas Eve, truly bringing new light to the darkness that surrounds us in the winter. Since Christmas falls on a Sunday, (eliminating two holyday collections), parishioners will see both a Sunday Dec. 25 envelope **and** a Christmas envelope. Gentle hint! I am so deeply grateful for your generous support of the Cathedral. Enjoy these final days of Advent.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector