

Eucharistic Vigil Homily

In Preparation for Episcopal Ordination of Most Reverend James D. Conley

Archdiocese of Denver

May 29, 2008

by Most Reverend Daniel E. Thomas of Philadelphia, PA

“Protect us Lord as we stay awake, watch over us as we sleep, that awake we may keep watch with Christ and asleep rest in his peace.” Together with the whole Church of Denver, we gather this evening to keep vigil: A vigil of prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, our Eucharistic Lord. A vigil in preparation for the Ordination of Auxiliary Bishop James D. Conley.

The Archdiocesan website offered this explanation the propose of our gathering this evening: “All are invited to join together in prayer for Bishop-elect Conley, for Archbishop Chaput, and the entire Archdiocese of Denver.”

As we begin this vigil, it’s only appropriate that we reflect on the reason for our presence - the nomination by our Holy Father Pope Benedict of a new Auxiliary Bishop for Denver. Some who are not Catholic, even some who have been Catholics all their lives, might ask the question - What is an Auxiliary Bishop?

Tonight, even Bishop-elect Conley, who worked in the Congregation for Bishops for ten years, may be asking himself, “What is an Auxiliary Bishop??”

Before a recent celebration of Confirmation, I asked just that question, “What is an Auxiliary Bishop?” One precocious boy responded, “An Auxiliary Bishop is, well, you know, kind of an understudy! When the real actor can’t be there, the understudy fills in for him.”

Bishop Conley - you may discover that there’s more truth to this than you might think!! The Ordinary and Auxiliary may not be “actors,” but they do act “in the person of Christ the Head.” And in fact, there will be an aspect of being an understudy - Bishop Conley you will learn daily from your Ordinary. Be an attentive student, you have a most worthy mentor. Archbishop, your “understudy” will act for and with you for the good of the lay faithful, consecrated religious, deacons and priests of Denver. Be for him a true father!

So, just who/what is this Auxiliary Bishop? The Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops puts it this way: “The Auxiliary Bishop, the principal co-worker of the

Diocesan Bishop in the governance of the Diocese, is appointed in order to provide more effectively for the good of souls. The Bishop should look upon the Auxiliary as a brother and should involve him in pastoral projects, decisions and in all diocesan initiatives so that through their mutual exchange of ideas and opinions, then may proceed, in unity and harmony in their intentions and endeavors. For his part, the Auxiliary Bishop, conscious of his role at the heart of the diocese, will always act in complete obedience to the diocesan Bishop respecting his authority” (70). While the auxiliary shows respect and reverence for the Ordinary, he, in turn, shows fraternal love for his auxiliary, holding him in esteem. (CD)

This is our prayer for both of you this evening - Archbishop Chaput and Bishop-elect Conley - that you work tirelessly to teach, govern and sanctify the flock of Denver, that your witness as Apostles and brothers in the College of Bishops may encourage and inspire.

“Protect us Lord...Watch over us...”

During this vigil, we pray for the People of God of Denver, who look to their Shepherd and his Auxiliary to protect them from the evil one, to assist them to keep watch with Christ at every waking moment, and to lead lives of virtue so that they may rest in His peace now and when they fall asleep in Christ in death.

Bishop Elect Conley - as you watch and pray during this vigil, there must be so many intentions on your heart which you want to bring before the Lord. He knows your needs. You bring to the Lord tonight your dear Mom, sister and family, and your dear departed Dad. Your prayer includes your many family and friends, classmates from Kansas University, so many seminarians, priests and deacons from the Mount and the NAC; so many young people you have served as University Chaplain, friends in the Congregation for Bishops, so many consecrated women and men religious, your dear parishioners of Blessed Sacrament Parish. As you exchange the fields of Wichita for the mountains of Denver, you are to surrender to the Lord this evening before whom you will prostrate tomorrow so that he may form you into the “shepherd, fisherman, father, brother, friend, comforter, servant, teacher, leader and sanctifier He desires (PDB#2). In this way, you will point to Jesus, and so be characterized “as a man of faith and discernment, a man of hope and serious commitment, a man of gentleness and compassion, a man of communion.”

Bishop Conley, tomorrow there will be so many well wishers who will greet you with words of congratulations. I would like to offer you words which were a meditation for me just before I was ordained a bishop less than two years ago. One of our retired

Auxiliaries, 85-year-old Bishop Louis DeSimone, a truly humble and wise man, telephoned to offer me congratulations. He asked how I was feeling, to which I responded, as any priest would, that I was very conscious of my human weakness and felt most unworthy. Bishop DeSimone replied with these simple yet profound words, which I will never forget, and which I say to you tonight: “Do not be afraid. This is the reason you were born. This is what you were made for. This is your vocation.” My dear brother, Jim, the man we know who will lay prostrate on the Cathedral floor strives to be all priest all the time. By the grace of the Holy Orders you receive tomorrow, we trust and pray that, for the Church, you will be all Bishop, all the time.

“Protect us Lord . . . Watch over us” . . .

To the wonderful people of God of Denver, I invite you to look to your shepherds. It is your Archbishop and his Auxiliary who will protect your faith and will watch over your lives. Tonight during this vigil, entrust them to the Lord, so that they may be for you shepherds after the heart of the Good Shepherd: holy, faithful, obedient men. I am always moved by that petition from the Intercessions found in the Liturgy of the Hours.

“Lord do not leave your flock without faithful shepherds to guide them, do not leave your shepherds without a faithful flock to follow.”

As we come together before the Lord and Shepherd of our souls, we place before him in a special way the priests of Denver, the close collaborators of the Bishop. As together with Archbishop Chaput and Bishop-elect Conley they break open the Word of God from their pulpits and break the Living Bread at their altars; we pray for their holiness of life, that they may be one in heart and mind with their bishops, living out their priestly ministry united in the communion of fraternal love.

“Protect us Lord...Watch over us”...

Our thoughts cannot but turn during this vigil in prayer to our Supreme Shepherd on earth, our Holy Father, Pope Benedict. Who of us was not moved by his witness to the Gospel during His recent apostolic visit to the United States? Who could not have been uplifted and energized in hearing thousands and thousands chant, “Christ Our Hope, Benedict our Pope.” It is the Successor of Peter who has given the new gift of an Auxiliary Bishop to the Archdiocese of Denver. During this vigil, we rejoice in that gift and we pray for Our Holy Father - that he may be strengthened in grace to carry out his Petrine ministry, and by example of life, teaching, preaching and sanctifying, confirm in faith all his brother bishops. My dear brother, Jim, together with the whole Church of Denver, listen again to the words of Benedict XVI (April

16, 2008) - addressed to us bishops in the Crypt Chapel of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception.

We need to rediscover the joy of living a Christ-centered life, cultivating the virtues and immersing ourselves in prayer.

When the faithful know that their Pastor is a man who prays and who dedicates his life to serving them, they respond with warmth and affection which nourishes and sustains the life of the whole community.

Time spent in prayer is never wasted, however urgent the duties that press upon us from every side. Adoration of Christ our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament prolongs and intensifies the union with him that is established through the Eucharistic celebration (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 66)

Contemplation of the mysteries of the Rosary releases all their saving power and it conforms, unites and consecrates us to Jesus Christ (cf. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, nn. 11, 15).

Fidelity to the Liturgy of the Hours ensures that the whole of our day is sanctified and it continually reminds us of the need to remain focused on doing God's work, however many pressures and distractions may arise from the task at hand.

Thus our devotion helps us to speak and act *in persona Christi*, to teach, govern and sanctify the faithful in the Name of Jesus, to bring his reconciliation, his healing and his love to all his beloved brothers and sisters. This radical configuration to Christ, the Good Shepherd, lies at the heart of our pastoral ministry, and if we open ourselves through prayer to the power of the Spirit, he will give us the gifts we need to carry out our daunting task, so that we need never 'be anxious how to speak or what to say' (Mt 10:19)."

"Protect us Lord...Watch over us"...

Through the Episcopal ministry of Archbishop Chaput and Bishop-elect Conley, Protect and Watch over the Church of Denver, Lord, "that awake we may keep watch with Christ, and asleep, rest in His Peace."

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