

Day Three

Zeal for the Mission and Suffering

Zeal

Zeal consists in the effort to detest, flee, to prevent or repel everything opposed to the will of God or the glory of his name. (Neumann's 'note book')

We've all encountered people who are on fire with the Spirit, who want to convert us, to help us be born again. Do we trust their zeal? Would we trust Neumann's zeal, the enthusiasm that enabled him to travel miles on horseback through the wilderness to preach the gospel to poor farmers?

Neumann believed that allowing Catholic immigrants to remain empty of the Word was contrary to God's will. Further, he believed that God wanted him to be the messenger of the gospel to those isolated from the Church. So, he embraced his calling with what we might deride today as 'all the zeal of a missionary.' Yet for him it was a sacred trust.

Suffering

The greater our sorrows now, the greater will our joy be hereafter. God would not impose such a sacrifice on us, did he not deem it salutary for us and were he not willing to impart the necessary strength. (Neumann's letter to his parents, February 11, 1836)

Like many Roman Catholics throughout the centuries, Neumann believed that suffering brought one closer to God. Indeed, he willingly embraced suffering so he could share, in some small way, in the suffering Jesus endured on behalf of humankind.

The sufferings were many in his life: The loneliness in the seminary in Prague, the departure from his family and loved ones, the trying life of a pastor alone in the extreme cold and difficult conditions of the north eastern US, the anti-catholic sentiment he witnessed, the loneliness of a diocesan priest, the struggles of being a pastor as a bishop, the criticism he had to endure regarding his personality and way of life as a bishop. Yet, through all these he kept steadfast in his resolve to unite his sufferings to that of Christ.

Passion of Christ, Strengthen me. (Neumann's Episcopal motto)

When called to be Bishop, even one so saintly as Neumann felt completely inadequate and unworthy to the task and cried out for help to the Lord. We would do well to understand that Neumann specifically invoked Christ's Passion, drawing strength from the belief that nothing can be as difficult for us as what Christ endured. And everything can have as glorious an outcome.

We learn from 'The Little Bishop' St. John Neumann that as Redemptorists today we must be men with zeal, with fire for the mission of the Lord, willing to leave our comfort zones to reach out as Missionaries of Hope in the footsteps of the Redeemer. This will naturally entail suffering, but leaning from the Little Bishop we unite our sufferings with the sufferings of the Lord and we will be strengthened in the mission of the same Lord.