

Homily of Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston
President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Closing Mass of the Convocation of Catholic Leaders
2:00pm, Tuesday, July 4, 2017
Hyatt Regency Orlando
As delivered, with emphases

Sisters and brothers, as the First Letter of John says, "It is the final hour!" [Laughter]

I have three little pre-notes in my homily to do today, on this day of Fourth of July and this Votive Eucharist for the Evangelization of Peoples.

The first is: *thanks*. Thanks to my brother bishops, in so many positions, talking, speaking, reacting, in terms of being with their people, in so many ways they've responded to this. To priests, to deacons, both transitional and permanent. Thanks to consecrated religious, both the women religious and men religious here, obvious, beautiful. Most especially thanks to all the lay leaders. Thank you so much for your presence. Thank you. [Applause] We are a little smaller now, we are becoming "smaller than any other nation" [cf. Daniel 3:37] because people are going home to the airplanes and all, but there's still enough of us here, so this is good. May I add one comment here, of some practice: You'll be filled, I hope, with the Spirit, and filled with energy from what has happened these days here. I ask you when you get home, be careful how you make this known to parishes, diocesan staffs, your various associations. They're liable to take you to the ER and ask for some sort of a heart thing because of how energetic you are, but we hope and pray that God will bless you.

And that second point, I want to thank you for the beautiful, beautiful release they did about Brian ... [Applause] I want to thank them for the beautiful release they did about Brian Johnson, who was [Galveston-Houston's] Director of Adolescent Catechesis and Evangelization, [who] died suddenly a few weeks ago. Real hard time for us in Houston. Thirty years, almost, in that capacity. Brilliant catechist and just a crazy riot of a sense of humor. And thank you for remembering him. I think if he's looking down today, he would say "Isn't it beautiful, Cardinal, that they remembered me, that they took me seriously, even though it only lasted a minute-and-a-half rather than three minutes which I would have preferred." [Laughter] But that would be Brian.

Finally, I want to talk about his beautiful Convocation briefly, another third point, and that is that it is a "joggers millennial" Convocation, why is that? Because to get *to* anywhere *from* anywhere it requires of those of us who are aging and elderly a great deal of walking that befits a younger jogger. [Laughter] I am reminded of the beautiful statute of Donatello, in the Bargello museum of Florence, of John the Baptist. From the neck down, he's the body of a twenty-one-year-old runner; from the neck up, he's the face of two-thousand-year-old man. I won't tell you which one I think I am but in any case [Laughter] ... it's a beautiful image. John the Baptist is running, pointing out to the Lamb of God; isn't that what we're doing here? Beautiful.

Our Convocation concludes with this Liturgy on the Fourth of July, the day we remember our birth as a nation. We think of our country and as the Fortnight for Freedom expresses it this year, "We pray to promote a culture of freedom for all, especially religious freedom, rooted in the nature of the human person." We are called to defend the dignity of every individual in every community in this land. In the hymn "America the Beautiful," we sing at one point:

*America, America,
God mend thy every flaw,*

*Confirm thy soul in self control,
Thy liberty in law.*

Oh, there are many joys here, but oh so many flaws need to be mended in America. About race and discrimination, about immigration and refugees, about the disabled, about those who have no voice and are oppressed, and those whose voicelessness is because they don't even have a name yet; they are unborn. Tsk. Our liberty is also a challenge to self-correction, repentance, and renewal. Yet we do rejoice for our land today. We are sent as Missionary Disciples from here and for here, but also stretching ourselves out even further.

There is a Gospel hymn that has been on my mind as I prepared these reflections, prepared this homily:

*Lean-ing, leaning,
Leaning on the everlasting arms;
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms.
Safe and secure from all alarms;
Leaning on the everlasting arms.*

Let that be a motif for my brief reflections today.

Yes, we are on a pilgrimage, a way supported by the Lord. We lean on the arms of the Word, the Word we've heard proclaimed out loud this afternoon. We lean on the arms of his Son's Precious Body and Blood.

Today's Word in the First Reading is stirring. It's a July Fourth reading. The fireworks are coming out. *Heart and mouth believe and confess!* Yes, this is Saint Paul's concrete language: how we're justified and saved. And it is indeed a Catholic Fourth of July "Declaration." Perhaps another way to say it, in still another language: "Dichosos los limpios de corazón [cf. Matthew 5] ... [continues with another unidentified verse]." Purity of heart. That's what the first reading is about. Purity of heart. How we get there. It's the "Declaration." It comes from the grace of Jesus Christ.

But on this day of barbecue, fireworks, bands, and parties, this Gospel text is striking and seems to be jarring. *The most single contemplative chapter, it seems to me, in the New Testament, is read for us and proclaimed for us as we're going forth.* Say, what's going on here? What is happening here? What's happening in John 17—John 17, the end of the Last Supper—John 17, so many words—the Gospel of John, not just thirty verses, not just forty verses as in the other three gospels ... five chapters! At the end of it, Jesus does something unexpected. He lets the disciples *and us* notice how mute they are. They're just listening. He lets us in on his conversation, his prayer, with the Father. Many have noticed some fascinating things in this, not the least of which is: notice the singular way Jesus uses the first person singular. If we're up against "the Nones," if we're up against the narcissism, have you ever seen a more humble first person singular than what Jesus proclaims to his Abba Father today? *Incredible.*

Notice something else, which many commentators have noticed, including Pope Benedict XVI in his book on Jesus of Nazareth. He says, *this is Yom Kippur for Christians.* This is the Day of Atonement! Jesus offers himself to his Father. "I consecrate in Truth for the world, for my friends, disciples here, and those who will know you Father through their words." How empowering Jesus is, even to us. Mute but innerly listening, people, today at this Gospel. Yes, this is a *major Gospel text* to hear today sisters and brothers. This isn't a nice bible reading—"we'll do a nice bible study and disperse"—no no no, this is metaphysical. That's what Catholics and Orthodox believe. When this stuff is proclaimed, from the altar, from the pulpit, something is happening, is happening today.

I still remember, if I may take a brief sidenote, when John Paul II gave one of the Roman churches to the Coptic Orthodox Christians, they came [to Rome], and I went one Sunday out of curiosity, and the liturgy's very long. [But at one point] I stood, obviously it seemed to me it must have been at the Gospel, and they were all *weeping*. I asked someone after Mass, "Why are you weeping?" "Well, we're illiterate. It's the only time we hear the Gospel." ... We have throw-away missalettes, you and me, Oh my my my. How do we stand up for the Gospel?

Today's Gospel, Jesus' intimate words with the Father, he lets us overhear. *What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on these everlasting arms.*

You know Jesus gives so much power to his friends. It's amazing how he lets us work. You remember? Multiplication of loaves and fishes in the Gospel of John. In that multiplication, what happens? Jesus turns to them first and says, "You give them something to eat!" What do the apostles do? It's apostolic, it's gone on in the Church ever since. What do they do? They whine. [Laughter] It's a major Apostolic dimension of the Church. Every time Jesus gives us something we can't think about, "Well we don't have enough! We don't have the bread, we don't have ..." Tsk. Jesus' response: no wagging of a finger of disapproval of their less than excellent conduct here. Jesus just looks at them and says "Just give me what you have."

He's still saying it, sisters and brothers. When we see the complexity, when we see the impossibility, Jesus will ask us. We say, "Can't do it. Oh this is impossible." "Well then just give me what you have." Whatever seems to be so little on our part, he multiplies into an abundance beyond belief. They had twelve baskets left over then. Imagine the gallons we'll have left over if we do it at the Lord's word. *Multiplication.*

I'm always reminded one of the characters in one of Flannery O'Connor's stories could have eaten all the loaves and fishes after they were multiplied. See that's what we have to do, after they were multiplied. We get nurturing, then we become nurturers. Isn't that what we're sent out to do today.

Jesus gives the apostles and everybody who is sent out after them, in today's Gospels and forever, on Jesus' Day of Atonement, he gives that power. *Do we believe?* That's what St. Paul says: "We believe, yes." Then we can be poured out, and we can go out and do the work that has been asked.

And we're counting on so many people who have done it through the centuries! The chief one in my mind is the Mother of God. "More glorious than the Seraphim, more honorable than the Cherubim," as the Greek Christians say, "σὲ μεγαλύνομεν"—we magnify *you*! Why? Well, because you're so humble and straightforward. This humble and straightforwardness—Jesus' line to the apostles: do you notice in that line when they were asking about the bread? He didn't give a discourse even about self-giving, he just showed them by saying, "Give me, just give me what you have."

Sisters and brothers, we are in a very significant time in our Church in this country. And this John 17 today reminds me of how contemplative we're gonna have to be if we're gonna be active. Never are you more active than when the Word of God is overpowering you, when you are seated there, in God's loving grace, and when you are seated there you realize how much God can let you do. My is that active—learn the distinction between action and running around all the time. We just heard that this morning.

By the way, we've heard beautiful homilies these last few days, wonderful key sessions, just gorgeous.

At this point, you know I wouldn't know what further to say, my words. I want us to go forth, to be victorious; I want us to be humble, to listen, because we've been told that we've gotta listen ... Who ever listened as much as Jesus to the Father? And look at the mute listening of the Twelve in this Gospel today.

I can only think of a poem that's been with me the last ten days. I give it to you; it's by George Herbert, a metaphysical poet; it's in English, beautiful. Might put us together in a contemplative mood, so that we can move from here to *there* [gestures to the altar], because that's where it's really gonna count.

*Love bade me welcome. But my soul drew back
 Guilty of dust and sin.
Yet quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lacked any thing.*

*A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
 Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?*

*Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
 Ah, My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
 So, I did sit and eat.*

We sit, we are privileged to eat of the precious Body and Blood of the Lord. His Day of Atonement is ours *everyday*. We leave here and we are nourished and refreshed. We can go forth. We can do what we have to do. What's my invitation? Sisters and brothers I can't say anything else: "*Come! Lord Jesus.*"