



Archdiocese of Newark

Office of Communications & Public Relations
171 Clifton Ave.
Newark, NJ 07104
www.rcan.org

Text of Homily
The Most Reverend John J. Myers, JCD, DD,
Archbishop of Newark,
On the Occasion of the Inauguration Mass
of Governor Christopher James Christie
Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart
January 19, 2010

My brothers and sisters, look around and you will see the most beautiful, the most magnificent, building in the city of Newark, and in the state of New Jersey. With deep humility, I do not hesitate to say that this is the most beautiful and most magnificent cathedral in the United States.

Our first reading, from the Hebrew Scriptures, recounts the story of the dream of Solomon. Solomon built a great temple to the glory of God. It took only seven years to build that great temple in Jerusalem. Our cathedral was under construction more than half a century. Solomon's temple was built of local Jerusalem stone, of cedar from Lebanon, of olive wood, and of bronze adorned with gold. Our cathedral combines the best of the Old and the New Worlds. It draws its design and inspiration from France, its windows from Germany, its mosaics and marble statuary from Italy. Yet truly it is an American cathedral. It is constructed of granite from Vermont, of copper from Montana, and of steel from Pennsylvania. It is decorated with limestone from Indiana, marble from Georgia, and white oak from throughout the Appalachians. But most important, it was built by the workers of New Jersey, drawn from every corner of the globe. Those workers well represent the people of the great State of New Jersey, today as a century ago, still drawn from every corner of the globe.

This cathedral is a fitting place for us to gather today to mark an historic moment in the life of New Jersey. It sits on the highest hill in New Jersey's largest city.

New Jersey is a state whose stones cry out to proclaim the history of our nation. From its earliest days New Jersey was built on the heritage of peoples from many nations. Before there was a New Jersey there were the Native Americans of the Lenape tribe. In 1524, the first European contact was made by Giovanni da Verrazzano, an Italian explorer serving the Crown of France. In the 1630s and 40s, the Dutch settled Bergen, Paulus Hook, Pavonia, and Communipaw in what became Jersey City and, in Hoboken, established the first brewery in North America.

In 1642, the Swedes founded Sveaborg, which we now call Swedesboro.

In 1664, the British took control and King Charles II granted the lands between the Delaware and Hudson Rivers to his brother, the Duke of York. The king named this land New Jersey, in honor of the island of Jersey that sheltered Charles II during his exile after his father's execution.

Just over one hundred years later, the people of New Jersey exiled King George III's royal governor, who happened to be Benjamin Franklin's illegitimate son, and become the center of revolutionary activity, known to historians as the "Crossroads of the Revolution." Fort Lee, Trenton, Princeton, Bound Brook, the Delaware Forts, Monmouth, Connecticut Farms, Springfield are just a few of the great battles fought on New Jersey soil. By the way, there even was a "Battle of Short Hills."

General George Washington directed that the uniforms of the New Jersey regiments should be dark blue, faced with buff. The state adopted a flag with a ground of this historic and unique color, selected by the Father of our Country. That flag proudly flew before the combined American and French armies at the culminating event of the Revolution, the surrender of the British armies at Yorktown. And let us not forget that the success of the American Revolution was due, in no small measure, to financing and supplies of munitions from Cuba and other parts of Latin America.

The founders of our republic established our independence "with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence"¹ and its continued prosperity is recognition of the presence of God in our midst.

Today, as we begin the ceremonies of the inauguration of a new governor, who derives his "just powers from the consent of the governed,"² we ask the blessing of Almighty God on our new governor, our new lieutenant governor, and on all the people of the State of New Jersey.

Governing is not an easy task today and, in all honesty, it always has been an arduous undertaking. Let us return to the Hebrew Scriptures for enlightenment. In the First Book of Kings, God appears to the young King Solomon, early in his reign, and offers to give him whatever he asks. Solomon responds: "Give your servant...an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong."

Solomon must have been a bit discouraged at this moment as he adds to his request: "For who is able to govern this vast people of yours?" I would imagine this concern of Solomon's would find resonance in this building at this moment.

The Lord God is quite pleased with Solomon's request. He tells him that because he didn't ask for a long life, or for riches and wealth, or for power to conquer his enemies that "I will make you wise with an understanding heart. You will be more wise so that

¹ Declaration of Independence.

² Declaration of Independence.

there will never have been anyone like you up till now.” The gift God gives King Solomon is wisdom. To this day all history remembers the many stories from scripture and later Jewish writings that illustrate “the wisdom of Solomon.”

In the book of Wisdom, we find a list of the qualities of Wisdom. Here Wisdom is described as feminine. “For in her is a spirit intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, agile, clear, unstained, certain, not baneful, loving the good, keen, unhampered, beneficent, kindly, firm, secure, tranquil, all-powerful, all-seeing, and pervading all spirits, though they be intelligent, pure and very subtle.³ She, who is one, can do all things, and renews everything while herself perduring; and passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God and prophets.”⁴

What do these qualities imply? Wisdom is the gift to see things as God sees them. It sees everything for its true worth in relation to God. Wisdom penetrates through events and perceives God’s presence at work even in tragic situations. It helps us to see what God wants and to do it. God was pleased that young King Solomon asked for this special gift. It is a priceless gift that we all need - to see what is really important in life. God can make us wise if we ask Him. He can help us see things as He sees them.

But this is not the end of this conversation between Solomon and God. God’s gifts to Solomon will be fruitful only “if you follow me by keeping my statutes and commandments.” Is God making his gift conditional? No, God simply realizes the human condition. Being wise with an understanding heart does not eliminate our free will. We still have the ability to choose between good and evil. History tells us that all was not perfect under the reign of Solomon, but that during the times that Solomon was faithful, the kingdom prospered.

We will prosper if we allow God’s wisdom to direct our lives and our decisions. We will prosper if we follow our consciences. Conscience is not some “little voice” within that directs us. For our consciences to be authentic and honest, they must allow God’s wisdom to form them, allow God’s wisdom to direct us. Otherwise, we are deceiving ourselves and allowing our desires to rule our consciences. If we allow desire to direct us rather than wisdom, we follow the example of our first parents who allowed the spirit of pride to lead them to taste the forbidden fruit. This can happen to anyone. It happened to Solomon in the course of his life.

We must continually seek to inform our consciences through reflection on the Word of God, and to conform our consciences to the Will of God. In what many consider the most beautiful passages in the Gospels, Jesus gives us direction. He does not give us a list of commands but instead tells us the kind of people who are blessed by God, who are friends of God, whom we should strive to imitate, whom we must cherish, and for whom we must care.

³ Wisdom 7:22-23.

⁴ Wisdom 7:27.

God's friends are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the hungry, those thirsting for righteousness, the merciful, the clean of heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted.

To be poor in spirit and to be meek is to accept that we cannot change everything we wish, that we are not completely the masters of our own destinies. It is to accept that we are part of God's plan. It also is to remind us that we have a responsibility before God to assist those who are poor in material things that we might have in abundance.

Mourning is a part of the life of each one of us. We are mortal. Earthly death comes to us all. When we lose a loved one, we mourn. Mourning is the natural reaction to the end of earthly life. More than ever, in these difficult times we must share the sorrows and the joys of others and we must assist those who mourn not only the loss of a life but the loss of their livelihood.

The righteousness about which Jesus is speaking is the righteousness of God, not a utopian fantasy. However, in seeking to achieve it, we must work to insure that all people are treated with justice and do what we can to change unjust conditions wherever we find them.

Those who show mercy to others are close to God who shows mercy to all. As Shakespeare wrote:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

Like the truly merciful, we must forgive others and allow compassion, not anger, to rule our lives.

When Jesus speaks of "the clean of heart," he does not mean a narrow notion of the heart as merely a font of emotions disconnected from the intellect and the will. Rather, he is referring to the inner person, to the seat of our moral personality. He may have been thinking of Psalm 51, "A pure heart create for me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me."⁵ The truly clean of heart are strong and generous persons who can live according to the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi: "O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love."⁶

As we began this Eucharist, I uttered the words: "Peace be with you," the words of Jesus' greeting to his followers. In both the Jewish and Islamic traditions, people daily greet one another with the words "Shalom" and "Salaam," or "Peace be with you." Peacemaking is a divine work. Peace means reconciliation, and God is the author of

⁵ Psalm 51:12.

⁶ The Prayer of St. Francis.

peace and reconciliation. Peace is the work of justice; if there were no injustice, there would be peace. It is not surprising that those who seek justice and peace are called by Jesus “the children of God.”

Is following the beatitudes easy? No. Jesus knew that and his last blessing was “Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” If we follow the teaching of the beatitudes, we will find that life is not always easy. The beatitudes are a challenge. But as long as we trust in God and stand up for what is right, we can be assured that we too will be blessed.

Today we pray for Governor Chris Christie, Lieutenant Governor Kim Guadagno, the members of the new administration of the State of New Jersey, we pray for all state, county, and municipal officials. We pray that you will be blessed with wisdom, even more we pray that you will be blessed with the wisdom of Solomon – you will need it.

We pray that Peace, Shalom, Salaam, will reign in your hearts and shine forth in your endeavors. We pray that the blessing of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will descend on you and remain forever.

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