

Remarks of 9 December 2009
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Ave María Purísima.

This morning, Bishop Peña and I said Mass together on this feast of San Juan Diego. In a particular way, I offered the Holy Sacrifice this morning in thanksgiving for the grace that the Lord has shown to me throughout my life, and for the grace of this day.

I am grateful to Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI for this expression of his will, an expression that I take as a manifestation of the Will of God in my life. I am delighted beyond words to have received a call to serve the Church in the Diocese of Brownsville, and I pray that the Lord will make me fit for the task at hand, to serve as a good priest, a wise shepherd and a compassionate Father to all the people living in the Valley.

I want to say thanks to Bishop Raymundo Peña for his warm greetings to me and for his generous hospitality. I am delighted that the Holy Father has named Bishop Peña the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese until the time of my installation on February 2, 2010. He will continue to shepherd this local church until that time.

I come as one who builds on the foundations laid by others, foundations of faith which were established many generations ago here in the Rio Grande Valley and throughout South Texas, through the labor of many missionaries, many priests and sisters, and most of all through the fidelity of many Catholic families who preserved and transmitted the Faith even in most difficult times. Bishop Peña has built up this local Church through 15 years of faithful service to the Diocese. I say thank-you to him. And I say thank-you to all the priests and seminarians, to the religious and lay faithful, and to the deacons, who have worked with Bishop Peña during these years, for their generosity in the service of the Lord.

We are all given a single life- time by the Lord, and the time is given so that we might serve. For the work of God's Church is never done, so long as time shall last, and it is a privilege to offer the service of one's life to her mission.

Three years ago, the will of God was expressed to me by the decision of Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, who sent me to serve as an Auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of Detroit. These last three years have been a great grace in my life; I have deeply loved the Church of Detroit, and have learned there a great deal about the grace of God, and generosity and perseverance of his people. I hope these lessons will bear fruit in my service in the Diocese of Brownsville.

I particularly wish to state my admiration and affection for Adam Cardinal Maida who presided over my ordination to the episcopacy. He guided my first steps as a bishop in Detroit with the wisdom, patience and kindness of a true Father. And I wish to express my high regard and deep thanks to Archbishop Allen Vigneron. During the course of the first year of his service as Archbishop of Detroit has been a true friend, and he has given to me a vivid example of that gentle courage that is so necessary in the ministry of a good shepherd.

I accept this pastoral responsibility with profound gratitude to the Lord for his providence in bringing me back to beloved South Texas. From my youth my grandparents and my parents cultivated in me a great appreciation for the dignity and richness of the border communities of Texas. This appreciation lives in the deepest part of me. This border culture, particularly in the Rio Grande Valley, was forged by the movement of history and directed by the efforts of families struggling to create a worthy life for their loved ones. The border bears the marks of having a particular destiny, a mission at the service of human development and cultural exchange. The Lord calls us to give testimony that the encounter between distinct cultures does not necessarily imply a clash, nor does it imply that one has to lose his cultural identity upon entering into a new situation. By the providence of God, we can show forth a pathway toward the future marked by cultural respect, the exchange of gifts, and of authentic human solidarity. May God help us to attain this goal.

The Church continues to offer the leaven of Christ to all who live in this region. Without this leaven, we cannot complete our mission. The leaven of Christ has its own proper dynamism, moving human hearts from the inside, to look for ties of peace and justice in the name of Christ., the Son of God who became a man so as to look for us as the elder brother of us all. The abundant love of Christ the Lord, shared with us from the Cross, urges us to a fraternal and unbreakable commitment to one another. Christ has been faithful in his love for us, and for this reason Catholics, and indeed all Christians, feel a strong call to labor for the good of all our brothers and sisters.

I am sure that the most common question I will receive over the next few weeks will have to do with my priorities as the Sixth bishop of Brownsville. Let me simply say that the priorities are given to us by the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Himself. We preach the Gospel, we announce Christ, so that the power of his grace might take ever deeper root in the hearts of his people. And thus, moved by the Spirit of the Lord, we work to draw all men and women into the mystery of God's love for us.

After the installation on February 2, I look forward to entering into a time of discussion with the clergy and religious of the Diocese, as well as with the lay faithful over the greatest challenges confronting us in the Diocese, and how best to meet them. I expect I will travel to each part of the Diocese to facilitate these conversations.

For right now, I will offer you a verse. From my childhood I was delighted by the small verses recounted to us by our grandparents, and I occasionally try to write one myself. This one might serve to identify the wider vision of the mission that together we have in the Church of Brownsville. (It probably does not translate so easily into English. But I will try.)

En Cristo bautizados,
Con su Sacrificio alimentados
A la vida nos entregamos,
Hasta que en el cielo descansamos.

Baptized into Christ,
Fed by what He sacrificed,
We give ourselves to life and love
Until we rest in heaven above.

What is our mission? I think it is the same one the Church has had across the centuries: To announce Christ, so that all men and women might seek baptismal life in Him. (*En Cristo bautizados.*) We work, also, so that all might have the spiritual understanding and fervor of heart needed to receive Christ Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. In this way we can experience the Eucharist as a sharing with Christ in the commitment of love made by Him to the Father and to us. (*Con su Sacrificio alimentados.*) Nourished with the sacrifice of love, we try to live so that others might have life also. (*A la vida nos entregamos.*) This means we are at the service of one another; this service given for the life of others often requires a sacrifice, yet only in the generosity it calls forth do we encounter the beauty and joy of the Christian life.

Finally, we walk together on the pilgrimage of life and history toward our heavenly homeland. (*Hasta que en el cielo descansamos.*) God calls us to an unimaginable glory, and we travel this pilgrimage of life together. We journey together with hope. We work so that no one grows too weary on this road we travel. If we leave behind anyone who might be discouraged on this road, if we do not make such a persons interests our very own, then Christ will not let us cross to the heaven he has prepared for us. We go together, or we do not go at all.

I cannot conclude my remarks without noting that on this Advent day the Church remembers San Juan Diego, and in three days we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I pray that the Blessed Virgin Mary, under her title of Our Lady of Guadalupe intercede before the Savior to whom she gave flesh in the tabernacle of her womb, for the good of my Episcopal ministry here in the

Diocese of Brownsville. And I ask her powerful help for all of the faithful, that we might ever enjoy the consolation of her maternal protection. Amen.
