

St. John Neumann: A Saint for Catholic Teachers

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When a young Bohemian immigrant arrived in New York City on a rainy June day in 1836 his hopes for priesthood were uncertain. Due to an ordination moratorium imposed by his homeland's government, St. John Neumann could not be ordained at home. Forsaking the comforts of home and family, desiring only his life's oblation in love and service, Neumann chose to go to America. He read accounts of such storied missionaries as Frederic Baraga – a current candidate for sainthood – and he hoped to follow in their footsteps. Little did the young seminarian know when he set foot on American soil that the path God had in store would result in his canonization as the country's first male saint.

Born in modern-day Czech Republic in 1811, Neumann grew up in a devout Catholic home, and he had many siblings called to religious vocations.

New York's bishop John Dubois – the one-time advisor to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton – was impressed quickly by Neumann's intellect and missionary zeal, ordaining him a priest within his first month in America. Dubois assigned him to regions near Buffalo, New York. While there, Neumann expressed how he faced many hardships and bouts with loneliness. Outwardly, he seemed successful, having established many parishes between Buffalo and Erie, Pennsylvania. But Neumann knew he needed a change. With the help of several priest-advisers, Neumann recognized his need for the support of a religious community to settle his troubled spirit, and he set out for the Redemptorist novitiate in Pittsburgh in 1840.

Neumann proved himself to be a competent and talented administrator, responsible for finishing the building project at St. Philomena's Church in Pittsburgh, where he ministered alongside a fellow Redemptorist, Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos. Neumann then went on to pastor several other churches, mostly in Maryland. A surprise came when Neumann was appointed the American provincial of his order in 1847, requiring a move to Baltimore, where he became a naturalized American citizen the following year.

The administration of his order brought heavy burdens to Neumann since Redemptorists in America at the time tended to work independently. Neumann was chosen to provide unity among his brothers and proved to be successful. In Baltimore, he also served as pastor of his order's St. Alphonsus Church and provided much needed support to many religious orders of women in the area. Neumann's talents as an administrator would change directions in his life yet again in 1852, when he was named fourth Bishop of Philadelphia by Blessed Pope Pius IX. He was ordained a bishop in Baltimore on his 41st birthday.

Neumann received an overwhelming welcome in his new diocese, and he was immediately recognized as a fatherly, kindly, and even saintly pastor. His legacy as bishop includes the establishment of the first American diocesan school system, the founding of religious orders, starting the Forty Hours Eucharistic devotion, and care for the poor and the city's booming European immigrants. Neumann led his flock courageously amid the rampant anti-Catholicism and anti-immigration prejudices of the Know-Nothing party.

Neumann excelled in the virtues, most notably humility, without which he said, *"other virtues could be neither genuine nor permanent."* Neumann desired sanctity, praying at his first Mass, "Dearest God, give

me holiness!" No matter what obstacles presented themselves in his life, Neumann responded with a total "yes" to God.

A life of love and service came to a sudden end when, on Jan. 5, 1860, at age 48, Neumann collapsed from a stroke on a Philadelphia Street. In 1977, when Neumann became the first (and to date, only) American bishop to be canonized, Pope Paul VI said that for Neumann to accomplish his great works, "love was necessary. And love meant giving; love meant effort; love meant sacrifice. And in his sacrifice, Bishop Neumann's service was complete." His feast day is January 5.

So, in outline form, how does this affect the Parishes of Saint Frances DeSales and Our Lady of the Lake (plus, the St. Benedict Center) as well of the Corpus Christi School and our own Knights of Columbus Council #7115?

For the two Parishes and Staint Benedict Center:

A clear demonstration of the level of our perseverance in Faith. The details and challenges that he faced behind what is included in the "Cliff-Notes" I just read ---- is shown herein/below in "Outline Format":

1. John Neumann was not a great student:
 - a. Public Schools in Bohemia ended at age 10 when boys were expected to be ready for work
 - b. Continuing Education was on a "Family-Paid" basis which John's family could not afford
 - c. Yet, he completed enough study to enter the Priesthood
2. John Neuman completed his Seminary Work in near record time:
 - a. However, at the time of being ready for Ordination, he was told that there were no openings for German Speaking Priests
 - b. He then went to school to learn other Slavic Dialects
 - c. Only to find out that there was a moratorium on Priestly Ordinations and that Missionary Assignments in America required "Fluent" English
3. John Neumann learned English & applied for Missionary work in America as an un-ordained Priest:
 - a. Waiting his time in the "Que" in Paris working odd jobs to survive; but, still without travel funding by any American Diocese
 - b. After securing funding, he boarded a "Three-Master" Sailing ship with only \$40.00 for Room and Board for the 40-day trip
 - c. Arriving in New York City in a five-year-old suit with only about \$1.00 in his pocket

4. Spiritually, meeting Bishop John Dubois to achieve his lifegoal of Ordination on June 25, 1836, and the recognition as being a future leader and a man of the ability to do God's work

For our Corpus Christi School:

After bouncing around through several parish assignments, John was named the Bishop of Philadelphia in 1852 and began his everlasting foundation of God's Works:

1. John Neumann started the American Catholic School System (being over 100 schools in 7 years)
2. He started two Religious Orders of "Teaching Nuns"
3. He developed opportunities for parishioner faith beyond the Catholic Mass and Sacraments through Devotions, Adoration, and Guilds
4. Because his Parishes served many Irish Immigrants, who were the poorest of the poor, he developed programs to care for and educate the poor

For our Council:

1. John Neumann's programs for the Poor were the inspiration and model for Blessed Michael McGivney in the early formation of the Knights of Columbus
2. He gives us the Model demonstrated above that the expansion of our Faith is often not upon the "Easy Road" or entering Heaven will not be through the "Wide Gate"
3. After his death in 1860, He was Beatified on October 13, 1963, and Canonized on June 19, 1977, by Pope Paul VI as the first male American Saint
4. [In my view](#), just-in-time and just as spiritually as was his chance meeting Bishop John Dubois, to officially become our Council namesake and leader by his example – less than 10 Months later on May 13, 1978. A "namesake honor" recognized at the time and by councils worldwide today.