

Homily by Adam Cardinal Maida
25th Episcopal Jubilee Celebration of Cardinal Maida / Mass of Thanksgiving
Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament
January 25, 2009

Your Eminence, Cardinal Szoka and my brother bishops and priests, deacons and religious, and brothers and sisters in the Lord:

Thank you for joining me today for this Eucharistic celebration as, together, we give thanks to God for the 25 years I have been privileged to serve as a bishop, 18-1/2 of them here in this great local Church of Detroit. In the providence of God, what was originally intended to be an anniversary celebration now also takes on the character of a liturgy of farewell, a special opportunity to thank each of you for the way you have worked with me in building up this local Church of Detroit.

Twenty-five years ago today, I was ordained a bishop in the Cathedral of St. Francis Xavier in Green Bay, Wisconsin. On that occasion, I had no idea that God's providence would bring me here to Detroit just six years later, to succeed my good friend, Edmund Cardinal Szoka, and to follow in the footsteps of the very man who had ordained me to the priesthood in Pittsburgh, John Cardinal Dearden. Today, as always, I cannot help but recall so many memories of the past – not only personal reminiscences, but also what we have shared collectively over the decades.

On this very day, January 25, the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, 50 years ago today at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls, Blessed John XXIII startled most bishops and members of the Church throughout the world, as he announced his intention to convoke the Second Vatican Council. And on the same day, in this very cathedral, John Cardinal Dearden was installed as the successor of Edward Cardinal Mooney. Clearly, today is a day of history and memories. But the history is not just the story of what happened. Like the liturgy itself, it is an ongoing, living reality. And so, this coming Wednesday, we will begin a new chapter in our 175-year history, our native son, Archbishop-elect Allen Vigneron will be installed as the 10th archbishop of Detroit. We come and go, but the work of the Lord goes on.

Twenty-five years ago when I received the call to the episcopacy, I chose the motto, *Facere Omnia Nova*, “to make all things new.” Building on the wisdom of Pope St. Pius X’s motto, “*to restore all things in Christ*,” I reflected on my own baptismal names Adam Joseph and the promise of the Lord in the *Book of Revelation* that he would “*make all things new*.” At times, “making things new” has meant taking initiatives and building new structures, but more often not, I have seen my motto lived out through spiritual renewal, through a daily interior commitment to hand over more and more of our lives to the Lord Jesus for the glory of God and for the building up of the Body of Christ, the Church.

Of all the things that we have accomplished here in the Archdiocese during these two decades, I truly believe the most enduring are the things that cannot be seen, things of the heart. As we have lived through the cycle of 18 liturgical years and the ups and downs of the economy and demographic changes, through it all, the Holy Spirit has been the driving force and the hidden energy of all that has happened. In all humility, my basic posture has always been to stay out of the way, the Holy Spirit was speaking or acting in the gifts and needs of our clergy, religious, and lay faithful. As I give thanks to God for the unique privilege of having been your chief shepherd all these years, I also want to thank each of you for your own witness of openness to the gifts and challenges of the Holy Spirit according to the particular circumstances of your vocation and state in life.

We gather this day on a very special feast, the conversion of St. Paul; we also do so at the mid-point of a year-long commemoration of the 2,000th anniversary of His birth. It is, therefore, in every way appropriate for us to reflect briefly on the words and witness of St. Paul, particularly the story of his own conversion.

As recorded in Acts 9, today’s first reading, Paul’s conversion was ultimately about “letting go” of a pursuit of personal perfection and justification according to the law in favor of being claimed and saved by Jesus the Christ. As Paul himself confessed several times in the corpus of his writings, prior to his conversion he was arrogant and self-confident, scrupulously trying to pursue his own righteousness before God. Through the conversion experience, he learned to be a receiver, to admit that he needed to be saved; he

could not achieve perfection on his own. Furthermore, he came to an appreciation of the fact that his salvation in Christ had everything to do with his loving relationship with all other members of Christ's Body, the Church. As he received Baptism and restored vision by the hand Ananias, he also needed the handclasp of faith and the support of Peter and James, and other leaders of the apostolic community in Jerusalem. Wise and learned though he was, as he matured in life and ministry, Paul came to appreciate in a very profound way that salvation is a gift to be received, experienced, and celebrated, in, with, and through the community of faith. Thanks to his conversion experience, Paul's center of gravity switched from self-preoccupation to being a true shepherd, concerned for the unity and harmony of the communities he founded.

My two immediate predecessors both looked to St. Paul as their guide and chose episcopal mottos from the words and witness of St. Paul. Cardinal Dearden's motto, *Servio in Evangelio*, a line from Romans 1, reminds us that, like Paul, every Christian must stand under the Gospel. The Gospel is greater than ourselves and our life-story makes sense only within the context of the Death-Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Cardinal Szoka, for his part, chose an episcopal motto also taken from Galatians 2 – namely that after his conversion, Paul thought of himself as having died so that Christ would live in him and through him. From now on, he would “live in faith” and all things would be seen and judged accordingly.

For the bishops gathered at the Second Vatican Council, St. Paul's life-witness became their model for priestly and episcopal ministry. Just as Paul called together and formed the community of faith through the proclamation of the Gospel, so, too, every Christian is called to a life of evangelization. This Pauline paradigm characterized the missionary, evangelizing zeal of the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II, and remains an enduring challenge for each of us.

Paul's passionate love for the Lord Jesus and his firm conviction in the Resurrection are indeed the Good News that we must embody according to a particular life circumstances – whether married or single, clergy or religious. St. Paul's conversion teaches us the enduring responsibility we have to hear the Lord's Word, to allow it to form and shape us, and take hold of us so that every aspect of our very being itself will become a missionary expression of God's love for all the world. Conversion is a daily personal call from the Lord; as we live through all the seasons of conversion, we can be compelling witnesses to others in the Church and in the wider society.

During the years I have served you, I have tried to the best of my ability to proclaim the Good News with conviction and hope, to celebrate the Holy Eucharist and all the sacraments prayerfully and fervently, and to shepherd this flock with patient attentiveness to the gifts and needs of all. In the process, I trust that I, myself, have matured and grown in the Spirit. I have also been continually humbled and edified by your goodness and generosity. As I draw this homily to a conclusion, I want to take the occasion to publicly thank all the members of the clergy – deacons and priests alike – for their faithful service and partnership in proclaiming the Gospel and celebrating the sacraments. I also want to acknowledge the contribution all the religious have made to our Church and the many different ministries they have embraced, including those religious who have chosen the contemplative life.

Finally, I rejoice also in the resilient faith and ever-enthusiastic love of our lay faithful. Over the years, we have had our joys and our sorrows, but through it all, I have no doubt we have grown closer to the Lord and thus, closer to one another. If I may be so bold, I would like to conclude my homily, my last public words as your Chief Shepherd, by quoting from the end of St. Augustine's great classic, *The City of God*. These are the very words that my predecessor, John Cardinal Dearden, used at his own farewell in October 1980; they express well my sentiments of gratitude and hope: *“I am done. With God's help, I have kept my promise. This, I think, is all that I promised to do when I began this huge work. From all who think that I have said either too little or too much, I beg pardon; and those who are satisfied I ask, not to thank me, but to join me in rejoicing and in thanking God. Amen.”*