

Presidential Address

Most Reverend José H. Gomez

Archbishop of Los Angeles

President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Baltimore, Maryland

November 15, 2022

My brothers,

First of all, I want to say that it's been a privilege to serve this conference and the family of God in America. Thank you for your patience and thank you for standing by me with your prayers.

During these last three years, I've been blessed with the rare opportunity to hear the concerns of many of the faithful Catholics that we serve across the country.

I've been touched by these conversations. With young mothers and fathers who are trying to raise their children to know Jesus in a difficult culture.

With young people, who are trying to make Jesus the way for their lives and trying to live their faith with integrity and joy. All of this gives me much hope for the future.

We've been through a lot of changes together.

We've been through a pandemic, through a long season of unrest in our cities; through a presidential election; through a time of deepening political, economic, and cultural divisions; the overturning of *Roe vs. Wade*; a new war in Europe; a worldwide refugee crisis; and troubling issues here in this country.

Through it all, brothers, I've been inspired by your faithfulness, by your love for Jesus Christ and our people, and by your fraternity and fellowship as we seek to carry out Our Lord's calling.

We've done some beautiful things together, things that have never been done before. We united in a moment of prayer with our Holy Father and the nations of the world during the pandemic, we rededicated our nation to the Blessed Mother, and we launched an ambitious program for Eucharistic Revival. We've been through a lot, and we are doing a lot.

The challenge of ministering in this moment is how to maintain some kind of perspective.

We live in a noisy, distracted media culture. And our society has moved hard and fast toward an uncompromising secularism; traditional norms and values are being tested like never before.

During these past three years, I keep coming back to something that Pope Francis said: "Ours is not an age of change, but a change of age."¹

In his interventions during the pandemic, and also in his social encyclicals, *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*, the Holy Father has helped us to see clearly, that what's going on in the world today is much deeper than some global "reset" or realignment.

The trials of this age are spiritual. There's a struggle going on for the human heart.

This change of age is an apostolic moment, it's a new opening for the Gospel. All of us in the Church are being called to a deeper conversion.

All of us are being called to step up and to open every door for Jesus Christ, to shine his light into every area of our culture and society; to bring every heart to a new encounter with the living God.

In his retreat talks at our June special assembly, Archbishop Anthony Fisher of Sydney reminded us of our identity and mission as bishops.

He reminded us that we are successors of the apostles, pastors and preachers, missionaries and evangelizers of culture. And our role is crucial.

It is not inevitable that our country will fall into secularism. The vast majority of our neighbors still believe in God.

Tens upon tens of millions of Catholics still serve God every day, and we are making a beautiful difference in the life of this country.

Our Catholic people are teachers and healers, seekers of justice and peace. We are serving the poor and vulnerable, raising up men and women of virtue, building strong communities and families.

All across this land, Catholics bear witness to America's promise that all men and women are created equal, that we are brothers and sisters under a God who loves us.

As many of you know, one of my favorite Americans is Dorothy Day, who founded the Catholic Worker Movement.

In one of her retreat notes, she wrote: "There is room for greater saints now than ever before. Never has the world been so organized — press, radio, education, recreation — to turn minds away from Christ. ... We are all called to be saints."²

Dorothy Day wrote these words in the early 1940s, long before “big tech” and the internet. So, we understand: the challenges we face today are nothing new.

Now more than ever, the Church needs a bold pastoral strategy to communicate the Gospel, to use every media platform to turn hearts and minds toward Christ, to call our people to be great saints.

But what also strikes me about her words is her confidence. Dorothy Day was convinced that only saints can change the world. And she’s right. Holiness has always been the hidden force in human history.

The kingdom grows through men and women who are passionately loving the world, as God so loved the world. There is that lovely line from the early Church that we all remember: “What the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world.”³

Today we need to raise up a new generation of saints, holy men and women in every area of American life.

That’s why I’m hopeful for the upcoming Synod of Bishops. Because the Synod is about our vocation to love Jesus and to build his kingdom in the ordinary circumstances of our everyday lives.

The Synod reminds us that the Church is all of us together — bishops, priests, deacons, seminarians; religious and consecrated; lay people in every profession!

One of the most moving moments in the history of this episcopal conference was the address given by the Servant of God, Sister Thea Bowman, in 1989.

In describing the African American experience, Sister Thea told the bishops: “The Church ... is a family of families and the family has got to stay together. We know that if we do stay together ... we shall overcome ... and build together a holy city, a New Jerusalem ... where they’ll know we are his, because we love one another.”⁴

Brothers, that’s what this moment is all about.

It’s about remembering that we’re in this together, that we belong to God, and that we’re all called to be saints. It’s about each one of us doing what God is calling us to do to build his kingdom.

What holds us together, what makes us one, is the Eucharist. Which is why our Eucharistic Revival is so important.

The Eucharist is the mystery of our Creator’s love, the mystery of his desire to share his divine life in tender friendship with each of us. So, let’s open the doors in all our churches, and let’s invite our people back, to come and see how much Jesus loves them.

Just one last thought.

In the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in our nation’s capital, engraved in the one of the chapel walls, are the words of one of our predecessors, the Venerable Frederic Baraga, first bishop of what is now the Diocese of Marquette, Michigan. A missionary from Slovenia, he loved and defended the native peoples that he came to serve.

His words on that wall are a prayer. They read: “This is all I desire, to be where God wants me to be.” Brothers, let us have only that desire — to be where God wants us to be, and to do what God is calling us to do.

Thank you for listening and thank you for these last three years. Entrusting all of us to the heart of Holy Mary, the Immaculate Conception, I ask that God bless you and all the people you serve.

¹ Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, July 28, 2013).

² William D. Miller, ed. *All Is Grace: The Spirituality of Dorothy Day* (Doubleday, 1987), 102.

³ *Letter to Diognetus*, 6.

⁴ *Sister Thea Bowman, Shooting Star: Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Celestine Cepress (St. Mary's, 1993), 36.