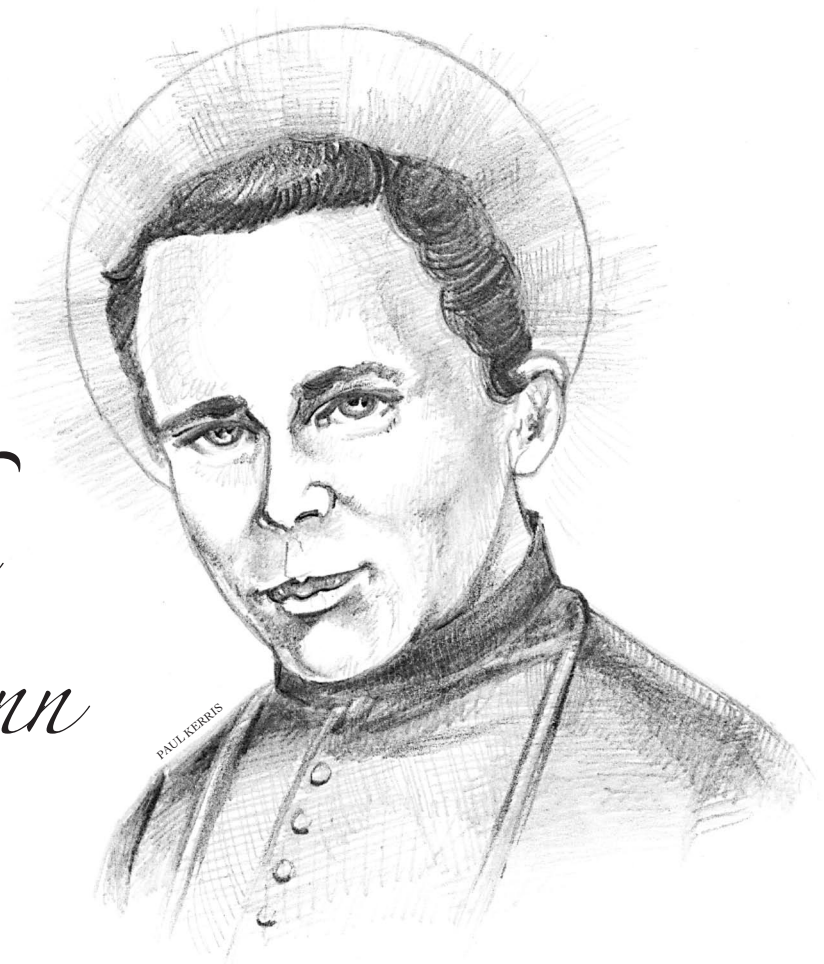


St. John Neumann



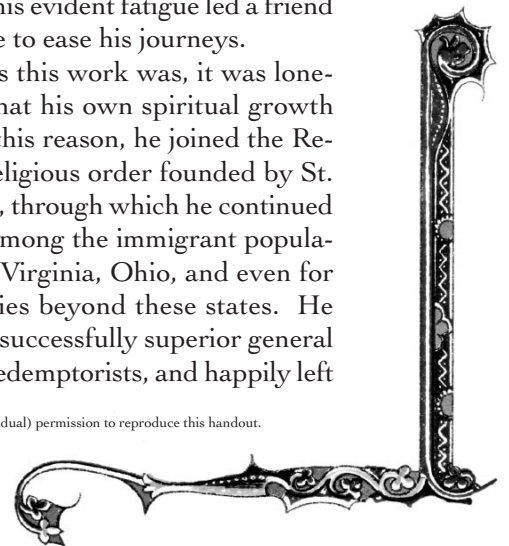
BORN 1811; DIED 1860
BISHOP
FEAST DAY: JANUARY 5

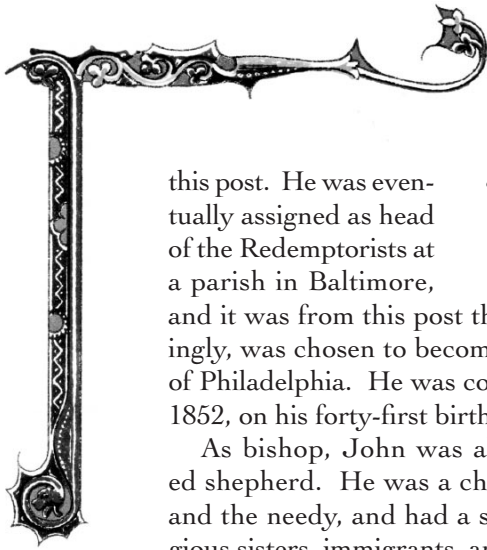
JESUS, the Supreme Shepherd, had compassion on the multitude, on people hungry for food and for more besides. In his love for the multitude, Jesus empowered the apostles to become ministers of love, to minister lovingly to others. In the mid-nineteenth century, Jesus' love found an especially willing instrument in St. John Neumann.

John was born in the village of Prachatitz, Bohemia (now in the Czech Republic), the third of six children of stocking-knitter Philip Neumann, of German birth from Bavaria, and his Czech wife Agnes Lebis. He grew up speaking both German and Czech fluently. He developed a deep faith from his mother, and she was the one to encourage him to seek the priesthood. Having studied in a local seminary and discovered a gift for languages (he learned six well and gained familiarity with two more), he soon felt a call to missionary work in America, where he could use his talent to serve its various immigrant communities. However, the ill-

ness of his bishop required postponement of his ordination, and rather than wait for an indefinite period of time, he set out on foot across Europe to a French port, from which he sailed to New York in 1836, at age twenty-five. There he was ordained and, for four years, he did missionary work among German, French, Irish, and American Indian families in the vicinity of Niagara Falls, New York, walking perhaps ten or twenty miles in a day to minister to his widely-scattered flock. Eventually his evident fatigue led a friend to lend him a horse to ease his journeys.

As rewarding as this work was, it was lonely and John felt that his own spiritual growth was lacking. For this reason, he joined the Redemptorists, the religious order founded by St. Alphonsus Ligouri, through which he continued missionary work among the immigrant population in Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, and even for a while in territories beyond these states. He was briefly and unsuccessfully superior general of the American Redemptorists, and happily left





this post. He was eventually assigned as head of the Redemptorists at a parish in Baltimore,

and it was from this post that he, most unwillingly, was chosen to become the fourth bishop of Philadelphia. He was consecrated bishop in 1852, on his forty-first birthday.

As bishop, John was above all a dedicated shepherd. He was a champion of the poor and the needy, and had a special love for religious sisters, immigrants, and children. At first scorned because of his less-than-polished way of dressing, his simplicity and kindness soon won the love of the people, while his learning and administrative gifts won their respect.

He founded over fifty parishes in his diocese, among them parishes created specifically for immigrants from Europe, and he became fluent in an additional six languages so as to communicate more effectively with his flock. He composed written catechisms in German and wrote a Bible history for use in the parish schools. He increased the number of parish elementary schools from two to almost one hundred and organized them into a diocesan system. His goal was one school for each parish. To staff these schools, he invited several religious orders of

*“As bishop, John was above all
a dedicated shepherd.”*

sisters to the diocese. When the American bishops convened for their first national

council, he was among the bishops who helped devise a Catholic education plan for the entire nation. He catechized his flock, as well, through instituting devotions such as the Forty Hours (a period of time in each parish combining one or more Masses, benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, excellent preaching, and opportunity for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament).

Although he was a bishop and thus excused from his religious vow of poverty, John lived austerely and gave away nearly everything he owned or received. He had only one suit of clothes, which was barely indistinguishable from rags. His tenure as bishop lasted not even eight years before he collapsed from a stroke on a street in Philadelphia, worn out from the multitude of his labors for those in his charge. Only at his funeral was this holy bishop finally at rest and dressed splendidly (no doubt by others since he would not have wasted money on himself). He achieved sanctity not by great deeds or heroic suffering, but by living out his vocation to a superlative degree, giving his entire being to those he had been called to serve.

