



President-elect Joe Biden and his wife, Jill Biden, attend Mass at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington Jan. 20, 2021, before his presidential inauguration. (CNS/Reuters/Tom Brenner)

Jack Jenkins

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*The following is the homily President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris heard Jan. 20 while attending Inauguration Day Mass at Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle, obtained by Religion News Service.*

*It was delivered by the Rev. Kevin O'Brien, a Jesuit priest and president of Santa Clara University, a Catholic school.*

Sixty years ago, John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic to become President of the United States, attended Mass on the morning of his inauguration, across town at Holy Trinity Church in Georgetown. Today, our President-elect and Dr. Biden have gathered family and friends to begin this inauguration day of another Catholic president in the same spirit of prayer and thanksgiving. As you have done so often in your public and private life and during the campaign, Joe and Jill, you ground this day in your faith and in the familiar readings and prayers of these sacred rituals.

Along with our Vice President-elect and her family, you come with humility and hope, asking God's blessing and protection, God's encouragement and strength as you serve our country. Our Lord delights in this holy desire to do good and responds with both a promise and a noble commission.

First, the noble commission.

The Gospel reading comes from St. Luke (chap. 4, verses 14-21), which is like Jesus' inaugural address. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus goes home to Nazareth, visits the synagogue, and reaches deep within his Jewish tradition to tell his neighbors what his public life is about. Invoking the prophet Isaiah, which we heard in the first reading (chap. 58, verses 6-11), he promises to care for the poor, free the oppressed, and relieve people of their burdens.

I am sure that today's inaugural address will be a bit longer than Jesus' brief reading from the Jewish scriptures! But knowing the Bidens, I am confident that the substance of today's inaugural address will echo Jesus' message because your public service is animated by the same conviction to help and protect people and to advance justice and reconciliation, especially for those who are too often looked over and left behind, the people whose voices you raised in the campaign and throughout your public life.

This is your noble commission. This is the divine summons for all of us, no matter our faith background or walk of life.

As you live out this mission as servant leaders, I also remind you of the Lord's promise, so beautifully proclaimed in the second reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians (chap. 4, verses 4-9): "The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. .... Then the God of peace will be with you."

We have much to look forward to as a country because of your and Kamala Harris' leadership. Every day, you will strive to heal our nation's wounds and reconcile differences and bring us together. You know too well the challenges ahead and the cost of service. My deepest prayer for you today, as a priest, citizen and friend, is that you always remember that the Lord is near and no matter the sound and fury around you, that God wants to give you peace, a deep-seated peace that will sustain you.

Let all of us hear the good news today: The Lord is near, so no need to worry or to be afraid. One of the surest signs of God's nearness to us are the people whom God sends our way. Joe and Jill, all the people whom you have gathered here in this cathedral — and so many more — love and support you, and will be with you as this new adventure in your life of service begins. Among this great assembly of family and friends are those close to you in the communion of saints in heaven, including your parents and your dear Beau. In the love of God that binds heaven and earth, they are with you today.

We can only imagine the prayers that Kennedy offered at Holy Trinity Church, six decades ago. Like theirs, our prayers today rise up to the God who promises to be with us and who gives us a noble commission to make this world a more just and gentle place.

When we embrace both our noble commission and divine promise, something remarkable happens. In the words of the prophet Isaiah which we heard: "the light shall break forth like the dawn." After too much darkness, the dawn breaks today, this inaugural day. Let us meet the dawn together, brothers and sisters, emboldened by our faith and civic conviction, full of promise and hope.

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