News



Cardinal Timothy Dolan celebrates Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City on Dec. 29, 2024, to mark the kickoff of the 2025 Jubilee. (OSV News/Jeffrey Bruno)

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A diverted trip, a grounded flight and an unexpected stay in Canada showed that "Jesus ... is in charge, not us," said Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York in a Feb. 15 homily.

The cardinal and several pilgrims from the Archdiocese of New York were bound for Ireland aboard United Flight 23 Feb. 13 when a passenger medical emergency required them to land in St. John's, Newfoundland, in the early hours of Feb. 14. After the ill passenger was transferred to a local hospital, the flight remained grounded due to high winds.

On Feb. 15, Cardinal Dolan gave a guest homily at the Basilica Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in St. John's, reflecting on the experience as a kind of spiritual teaching moment.

Looking ahead to the Feb. 22 feast of the Chair of St. Peter the Apostle — which honors the pastoral and teaching authority Jesus Christ bestowed upon the apostle recognized by Catholics as the first pope and bishop of Rome — Dolan said that "Peter had his world turned upside down by Jesus," who was "the most important person" in his life.

The cardinal noted that St. Peter's death dramatically underscored that point.

St. Peter is believed to have been martyred in Rome sometime between A.D. 64 and 68 under Nero's persecution of Christians. According to tradition, the apostle is said to have asked his executioners to crucify him upside down, protesting he was not worthy to die as Jesus had.



Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York delivers a homily Feb. 15 at the Basilica Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in St. John's, Newfoundland. The cardinal's flight to Ireland was unexpectedly diverted due to a passenger's medical emergency and then delayed by high winds. (OSV News screenshot/YouTube/Basilica Heritage Foundation)

"Jesus turned Peter's world upside down, and that must have dawned on him on that hill as he looked out at the city of Rome upside down," said Dolan. "He was literally ... head over heels in love with Jesus Christ."

In addition, "everything that Peter thought was important, Jesus said is not," and "everything Peter didn't think was that important, Jesus taught him was," the cardinal said.

That same inversion of values and expectations was clear in the Gospel for the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, the version of the Beatitudes in Luke (Luke 6:17, 20-26), he added.

"Think of the contradictions here," said Dolan. "Jesus says the poor will be rich. ... The hungry will be full of food. Those who are crying will be laughing. Those who are insulted and rejected will be prominent and will receive a reward."

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As a result, "all the earthly values of being full, being happy, being rich, being prominent and successful and prestigious, Jesus turned upside down," he said. "Peter found that out firsthand."

Moreover, "if you think about it, in his very person, in his very person, Jesus turned things upside down," the cardinal continued. "Jesus turned the earthly into the heavenly when he became one of us."

"Jesus turned the human into the divine," he said. "Jesus ... turns death to life. Jesus has a great way of turning our world upside down."

The cardinal said he and his fellow pilgrims had in "a little way" a similar experience of having their world "turned upside down," speaking of their Dublin-bound flight.

"What we thought we were about didn't happen, and here we are ... 48 hours later," he said. "Jesus has a great way of doing that, you see, because he's in charge, not us. It's his values that will endure, not ours. It is his teaching that will be victorious, not the wisdom of the world. And it's all the things that the world considers frivolous and stupid that he tells us are extraordinarily important."

Amid the detour, Dolan said he and his companions felt "at home" in the Newfoundland basilica -- and not only because Archbishop John "Dagger John" Hughes, New York's first archbishop, had preached there in 1855 and had been inspired to build New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral after seeing the beauty of the Newfoundland church.

"Wherever we are in the world, we find his church," he said. "We feel at home because we're part of the Catholic family. 'Catholic' means everywhere. 'Catholic' means everybody."

"And here we are at home on this Sunday, the Lord's Day, because once again, Jesus turns the world upside down. We thought we were strangers, and here we feel at home," Dolan said. "We thought we were kind of alone, and here we feel very

together, united with others who share that faith of St. Peter, who share that faith in the one who turned Peter's world and ours upside down."