More than anything, John Neumann wanted to be a priest. He learned six different languages so that he could preach about Jesus to as many people as possible. But his bishop thought that there were too many priests in Bohemia and would not ordain him. So John had an idea. He would sail to the United States where he knew they needed priests! He arrived in New York with only one extra set of clothes, a dollar in his pocket, and complete trust in God. And his trust in God worked. Only three weeks later, the bishop of New York ordained him a priest.

John faced many challenges in the United States. People did not like his strong accent, and children made fun of him because he was short. Others, who did not like that he always followed the rules, threw mud and stones at him. Still, he called them “friends” and took no offense. Since he was so alone in his work, John longed for community. He joined the Redemptorist Fathers and served as a pastor in Maryland for many years.

When he turned forty-one years old, John became the bishop of Philadelphia. He faced challenges as a bishop, too. His accent still made him unpopular. The United States was also deeply anti-Catholic at that time, and anti-Catholic groups burned down convents and churches. There were, however, many immigrants in Philadelphia who did not speak English. Knowing many languages, John could help them settle into the community and teach them about Christ. He even learned new languages to help them!

John knew that Catholic education was important, and he wanted children to learn about Jesus and the Faith. When he was first made bishop, there were only two Catholic schools in Philadelphia. As bishop, he increased that number to one hundred! He loved to visit the schools and answer students’ questions on their studies. He also wrote two catechisms that taught the Catholic Faith.

John served as bishop until he died of a heart attack when he was only 48 years old. After his death, everyone saw how much good he had done and was amazed. St. John Neumann, help me trust in God even if, at times, others don’t like me!
St. John Neumann
January 5