

# **Heraldic Achievement of Most Reverend Nelson J. Pérez, D.D. Tenth Archbishop of Philadelphia**

Per pale: dexter, argent on a pile azure a mullet in chief of the field, overall on a fess sable three plates each charged with a cross throughout gules; sinister, per fess azure and chevrony inverted azure and Or, in chief a Star of Bethlehem argent and in base a mound Or, over all on a fess sable fimbriated argent, a Paschal Lamb reguardant, carrying in the dexter forelimb a palm branch Or and a banner argent charged with a Cross gules

In designing the shield — the central element in what is formally called the heraldic achievement — an archbishop has an opportunity to depict symbolically various aspects of his own life and heritage, and to highlight aspects of Catholic faith and devotion that are important to him. The formal description of a coat of arms, known as the blazon, uses a technical language, derived from medieval French and English terms, which allows the appearance and position of each element in the achievement to be recorded precisely.

An archbishop shows his commitment to the flock he shepherds by combining his personal coat of arms with that of the archdiocese, in a technique known as impaling. The shield is divided in half along the pale or central vertical line. The arms of the archdiocese appear on the dexter side — that is, on the side of the shield to the viewer's left, which would cover the right side (in Latin, *dextera*) of the person carrying the shield. The arms of the archbishop are on the sinister side — the bearer's left, the viewer's right.

The coat of arms of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia contains symbols of both the secular and the religious history of this local Church. The white background and the black horizontal stripe bearing three white circles (Argent, on a fess sable three plates) were the arms of William Penn, the founder of the City of Philadelphia, and the first Proprietor of the Commonwealth that bears his name. To signify the Christian Faith, the three white circles are marked with the Cross of Christ in red (gules). Behind the stripe appears a blue pennant-shaped section (a pile azure) marked with a white star. This is a symbol of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is invoked, under the title of her Immaculate Conception, as the patroness of the archdiocese.

On the other side of the shield are the personal arms of Archbishop Perez. The background of the shield is painted blue, the color of the morning sky. At the base of the shield is seen a rising Sun, to represent Christ the Savior, “the dawn from on high” (Luke 1:78). This depiction of the rising Sun also recalls the coat of arms of the Republic of Cuba, adopted in 1906, which bears a rising Sun in the upper part of the shield or chief. Archbishop Perez's parents emigrated from Cuba to the United States a few months before his birth.

In the chief of the Archbishop's arms is a star, painted white. Placed above the rising sun, it depicts the Morning Star, which appears on the eastern horizon each day in the hours before dawn. It has long been a symbol of Our Lady, whose own Immaculate Conception heralded the birth of the coming Messiah. When Archbishop Perez was ordained a Bishop in 2012, his coat of arms bore an identical star to that in the arms of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, where he had served as a priest for 23 years. Now that he has returned to Philadelphia, he has modified this star; it now appears as the Star of Bethlehem, further signifying Our Lady's role as the guiding light of the New Evangelization. As his most perfect disciple, Mary always points the way to Christ.

The scroll below the shield echoes the symbolism of the Morning Star and the rising Sun. "Confide et spera," it says, "trust and hope" — words that recall and summarize many exhortations of Scripture to "trust in the Lord" and to find peace by placing every need and worry in the hands of the One for whom all things work for good (Jeremiah 17:7; cf. Psalm 37:7; Romans 8:28; Philippians 4:4-7; 1 Peter 5:7). Our Lady, Mother of Holy Hope (Roman Missal), is a model for every disciple, and teaches her children to place confident trust in her Son.

On a wide black stripe across the center of the shield, bordered in white (a fess sable, fimbriated argent), appears a Paschal Lamb in gold. These colors recall the coat of arms of the Perez family in Cuba, whose shield depicts five black wolves on a gold shield. The lamb, representing Jesus the Lamb of God (cf. John 1:36; Revelation 5:6, etc.) looks back over his shoulder (reguardant), to lead those who will follow his example and to "guide them to springs of the water of life" (Revelation 7:17).

As the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18), Jesus the Lamb has become the "inspiration and example for every martyr" (Liturgy of the Hours). The lamb on Archbishop Perez's shield also recalls Saint Agnes, the twelve-year-old Roman martyr who was killed in AD 304. (The saint's name sounds like the Latin word *agnus*, which means "lamb.") Saint Agnes is the patroness of the parish in West Chester, Pennsylvania, where the Bishop was serving as pastor at the time of his appointment as auxiliary bishop.

In addition to its typical attribute—a banner marked with a cross—the lamb also carries a palm branch, which in Roman times was used to adorn the burial places of martyrs. It also alludes to the coat of arms of Archbishop Perez's maternal relatives, the Ginart family, whose coat of arms shows a gold lion on a blue field, clasping a palm branch.

Every coat of arms also includes external elements that identify the rank of the bearer. A gold processional cross appears behind the shield; its two crossbeams indicate that the coat of arms belongs to an archbishop. The galero or "pilgrim's hat" is used heraldically in various colors and with specific numbers of tassels to indicate the rank of a bearer of a coat of arms. An archbishop uses a green galero with four rows of green tassels.

