

Archdiocese welcomes new archbishop

A joyous crowd of about 2,000 people filled the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Homeland Oct. 1 to celebrate the installation of Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien as the 15th archbishop of Baltimore.

In a tradition-rich ceremony whose ancient majesty reflected the importance of the occasion, Archbishop O'Brien accepted his new role as the spiritual leader of more than 500,000 Catholics in the archdiocese – humbly pledging to be their faithful servant and calling it “an honor and a privilege” to be their archbishop.

“Whatever I am, and all that I have I give to you,” said Archbishop O'Brien, speaking in a homily that was interrupted several times by warm applause. “And until that day when he calls me to judgment, I will seek to serve you with the whole-hearted love of Jesus Christ.”

Some 77 cardinals, archbishops and bishops from across the country and around the world attended the ceremony. They included Cardinal J. Francis Stafford from the Vatican, Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston, Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia, retired Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, Cardinal Edward Egan of New York, retired Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua of Philadelphia and retired Cardinal William Baum of Washington.

Cardinal William H. Keeler and Archbishop William D. Borders, Archbishop O'Brien's two immediate predecessors, were present – as were Baltimore's active and retired auxiliary bishops.

More than 415 priests, 62 deacons and numerous religious sisters and brothers also attended the special celebration – with the priests and deacons joining the bishops in an opening procession that lasted more than 30 minutes.

Archbishop Pietro Sambi, representing Pope Benedict XVI as the Vatican's apostolic nuncio to the United States, publicly read the apostolic mandate appointing Archbishop O'Brien to his new post after the archdiocesan priest consultors

inspected the document as part of the solemn ceremony.

When Archbishop O'Brien accepted the mandate, the congregation broke into applause that intensified as Archbishop Sambhi and Cardinal Keeler escorted Archbishop O'Brien to the bishop's chair. There, the apostolic nuncio handed Archbishop O'Brien a crosier that symbolizes his role as shepherd to the people.

Various representatives from the archdiocese, Gov. Martin J. O'Malley, Baltimore Mayor Sheila Dixon and ecumenical and interfaith leaders then greeted the new archbishop.

In his homily, Archbishop O'Brien, who previously headed the Archdiocese for U.S. Military Services for 10 years and was a former auxiliary bishop of New York, said he was aware of the historic nature of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Wearing the pectoral cross of Archbishop John Carroll, which Cardinal Keeler presented to him before the installation during a brief press conference at St. Mary's Seminary in Roland Park, Archbishop O'Brien said the history of the premier see "has been of decisive importance for the Catholic Church in the United States."

The Archdiocese of Baltimore was the founding diocese of the United States and Archbishop Carroll was the nation's first bishop.

The New York native paid tribute to the Maryland tradition of religious freedom. It was in Baltimore where the notion of religious freedom grew and flourished, he said, led by visionaries like Archbishop Carroll, Cardinal James Gibbons, Cardinal Lawrence Shehan and Cardinal Keeler.

"Here is where Catholics learned to defend the religious freedom of all," said Archbishop O'Brien, who on the night before his installation knelt in prayer at the tomb of Archbishop Carroll during a vespers service at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore.

The defense of religious liberty "contributed much to the noble tradition of interfaith tolerance and collaboration that has long marked this community," he said.

As the archdiocese's new leader, Archbishop O'Brien promised to promote religious vocations and challenge young people and all Catholics to give their lives to Christ.

Calling the right to life the “greatest civil rights issue of our time,” Archbishop O’Brien pledged he would “make every possible effort to continue and intensify the defense of the right to life that has been waged by my predecessors.”

“To all of those in crisis pregnancies, I pledge our support and our financial help,” he said. “Come to the Catholic Church. Let us walk with you through your time of trouble. Let us help you affirm life.”

Insisting that the archdiocese “cannot allow large parts of our city to die,” Archbishop O’Brien said he would collaborate with city leaders to build up the city of Baltimore and aid those in need.

The installation ceremony was marked by signs of the growing cultural diversity of the archdiocese. Some of the readings were proclaimed in Spanish and Archbishop O’Brien delivered part of his homily in Spanish. The general intercessions were prayed in Vietnamese, English, French, Spanish, Igbo, Tagalog, Korean and Polish. Representatives of the Urban Mass Choir, joined the Archdiocesan Choir and other musicians in providing music from a variety of cultures and languages.

Members of the congregation erupted in laughter when Archbishop O’Brien displayed his much-touted Irish wit in acknowledging that some may find it “puzzling, even ironic, that the Holy Father should choose a native son of New York to be archbishop of another part of the American League East.”

The archbishop won even louder laughs when he recounted how he gave a copy of his high school yearbook to the editor of the Catholic Review to be used for a “human interest” piece in a special edition published last week about the installation. Unknown to the archbishop, his junior year report card was tucked inside the yearbook. A member of The Catholic Review staff informed the archbishop of the discovery – “gleefully” informing the new archbishop that his lowest grade that year was in religion.

“Even my Irish imagination had a little difficulty in putting a good spin on that,” he said with a smile.

The archbishop then pointed out that he comes to Baltimore with a desire to give his

all in love.

“Knowledge of the faith is so very important, but what you do with that knowledge is ever so much more important,” he said.