

Editorial: Great heritage awaits Baltimore's new shepherd

Editorial by Christopher Gunty

When Archbishop William E. Lori took on the mantle of the Archdiocese of Baltimore May 16, he inherited the legacy not only of Cardinals Edwin F. O'Brien and William H. Keeler, who were present that day, but also the history of all the bishops who lived with and served the Catholics in the archdiocese, which once encompassed a third of this great land.

At a news conference at St. Mary's Seminary and University, prior to the installation Mass, Cardinal O'Brien passed to Archbishop Lori the pectoral cross worn by Archbishop John Carroll, the first bishop in the United States. This pectoral cross, worn over a bishop's heart, dates to the late 1700s and is a sign of the unbroken chain of 16 bishops who have shepherded the flock in Maryland and the United States.

These latest archbishops of Baltimore have more in common than their link to Archbishop Carroll. They are also connected through their apostolic lineage, the line of succession through their consecration. As Catholics, we acknowledge that our bishops can trace their ministry back to the apostles. It is one of the reasons that bishops all around the world visit Rome every five to seven years for a visit "to the threshold of the apostles" ("ad limina apostolorum"), referring specifically to Saints Peter and Paul. Bishops of the United States are making their visits in 2011 and 2012, including those of our region, who visited in January, when they made a point to visit the tombs of Peter and Paul in Rome, to connect their ministry to Christ's early followers.

Each bishop can trace his episcopal lineage through the bishop who consecrated him, and the bishop who consecrated that bishop, and so on. Most bishops alive today trace their episcopal lineage back to Cardinal Scipione Rebiba, an Italian cardinal who became a bishop in 1541. Records are a bit sketchy before that, but it's possible that he was consecrated a bishop by Gian Pietro Carafa, who became Pope Paul IV.

Archbishop Lori's line converges with Cardinal O'Brien's in the 1700s at Pope Carlo della Torre Rezzonico. Archbishop Lori converges with Cardinal Keeler even earlier, in 1933, at Cardinal Amleto Cicognani, who was at the time apostolic delegate to the United States, and responsible for many episcopal consecrations. Cardinal O'Brien's line happens to diverge because he was consecrated by Cardinal John O'Connor who was consecrated a bishop by Pope John Paul II, so his line

includes many others from different parts of Europe before catching up to Cardinal Rezzonico in 1743.

The key point is that this apostolic succession links our leaders to the instructions Paul gave to Timothy, his good and faithful disciple: “And what you heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well.” Paul links himself and the first Apostles of Christ as the first generation of witnesses to Christ and his teachings to Timothy, and entrusts to him the ability to pass on the faith to subsequent generations. In this passage, we see the first three generations of apostolic succession: Paul’s, Timothy’s and the one Timothy sanctifies by his teaching and example.

Our long line of bishops are also linked to Simon Peter, who was chosen by Jesus to lead the church. On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus asks Simon, “Do you love me more than these?” and receives an affirmative reply. “Feed my lambs,” Jesus tells him. Twice more, Jesus asks the question, until an exasperated Peter answers, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” And Jesus says to him, “Feed my sheep” (Jn 21:15-17).

Archbishop Lori comes to us, connected to Archbishop Carroll, connected to Peter, connected to Jesus. He told the Catholic Review on the day of his announcement, “I would hope to come to be known as a pastor of souls more than anything else.”

As our new shepherd, our new pastor, takes on his new role as the 16th archbishop of Baltimore, we pray for him as he sets out to feed his flock and nourish our souls with the Good News of Christ.

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