

On third anniversary of election, pope thanks Americans for love

NEW YORK – Describing himself as “the poor successor of St. Peter,” Pope Benedict XVI thanked Americans for their prayers and love on the third anniversary of his election.

The pope made the impromptu remarks at the end of a Mass April 19 in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, where some 3,000 bishops, priests, religious and seminarians gave him a standing ovation.

The crowd broke into applause when the pope’s secretary of state, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, delivered a Spanish-language message of “happy anniversary” and wished the pontiff many more years.

The pope took the microphone and, looking out on the sea of faces in the Gothic cathedral, smiled and spoke in a soft voice.

“I can only thank you for your love of the church, for the love of Our Lord and that you give also your love to the poor successor of St. Peter,” he said.

“I will do all that is possible to be a real successor of the great St. Peter, who also was a man with his faults and some sins, but he remains finally the rock for the church,” he said.

The pope prayed that he, too, with the grace of God, could be a worthy successor to St. Peter, even with what he said was his spiritual “poorness.”

Pope Benedict was elected as the church’s 265th pope April 19, 2005, on the second day of a conclave of 115 cardinals. When he appeared that day to a cheering crowd in St. Peter’s Square, he struck a note of humility.

“After the great John Paul II, the cardinals elected me, a simple, humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord,” he said after his election.

“I am consoled by the fact that the Lord can work and act even through insufficient

instruments, and I especially entrust myself to your prayers,” he said.

At the Mass in St. Patrick’s, New York Cardinal Edward M. Egan told the pope that New York Catholics were “greatly honored that you begin your fourth year as universal shepherd here with us.”

The pope, in his sermon, made only a passing reference to the anniversary and turned the spotlight back on the assembled priests, nuns, deacons and seminarians.

“I am happy to celebrate this Mass with you, who have been chosen by the Lord, who have answered his call, and who devote your lives to the pursuit of holiness, the spread of the Gospel and the building up of the church in faith, hope and love,” he said.