

World & Nation

Black archbishop claims proud heritage



Archbishop Eugene A. Marino doffs his zucchetto to the crowd at his installation.

By Gretchen Keiser
Atlanta (NC) — Atlanta Archbishop Eugene A. Marino told enthusiastic crowds at his May 5 installation ceremony that although he had at times been embarrassed by the South, "today I am not ashamed of whence I have come."

"With neither pretense nor apology, like so many of you I am a Southerner," the nation's first black archbishop told those attending the installation Mass at the Atlanta Civic Center.

"My roots go deep into the rich soil of Mississippi," the archbishop said. "I was born and raised in the deep South, in the old South, which was a curious mixture of gracious hospitality on the one hand and racial segregation on the other."

He said the experience of the old South paved the way for the new South, typified by modern-day Atlanta. "Today I am happy to be a citizen of Atlanta," said the Biloxi, Miss., native. "Today I am proud to call myself a Georgian."

The civic center was filled to capacity by an estimated 4,500 people, including Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young and Coretta Scott King, widow of slain civil rights leader the

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Archbishop Pio Laghi, apostolic pronuncio, installed the new archbishop. Principal concelebrants of the installation Mass included Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops; Washington Archbishop James A. Hickey; and Bishop Joseph L. Howze of Biloxi.

Also present were Cardinals Bernard F. Law of Boston, Joseph E. Bernardin of Chicago and John J. Krol of Philadelphia; at least 80 bishops; and more than 500 priests and deacons.

One of 12 U.S. black bishops and a Josephite priest, Archbishop Marino was auxiliary bishop of Washington in 1974-88. He is the son of a black mother and a Puerto Rican father.

At the new archbishop's request, the liturgy reflected the cultural diversity of the Atlanta archdiocese, including a Negro spiritual, a reading delivered in Spanish and an offertory procession with children dressed in ethnic costume. Representatives of the city's Vietnamese, Korean, black and Hispanic communities also greeted the prelate during the liturgy.

Archbishop Marino said that while "there can be no escaping" his role as the first black bishop to serve in Atlanta and as the first black archbishop in the nation, these factors "need not affect the quality of my ministry among you."

In his homily, which was frequently punctuated by applause, the new archbishop said he must follow the "Lord's command to 'feed my lambs' with the Eucharist, with sound doctrine, and with food for mind and body."

But, he said, "the good shepherd's heart must also go out to those weakest and most vulnerable members of the flock ... those on the fringes, those most likely to stray, those most threatened by danger."

Archdiocesan programs and institutions must reflect the Eucharist, "for it is in the Eucharist that we most authentically encounter Jesus Christ," he said, adding "we do the things we do with and for people not because they are Catholic necessarily, but because we are."

"Evil surrounds us, and danger threatens the entire human family today as never before in history," said Archbishop Marino.

"A widespread attitude of selfishness and immediate self-gratification has produced a flood of pornography and sexual immorality, and increasing alcohol and drug addiction," he said, adding that these factors have led to crime and violence.

"Over this grim landscape hangs the dark and ominous cloud of abortion," he said.

"Having made our peace with the death of the most innocent and defenseless among us, is it any wonder that we are so ineffective in dealing with hunger, with injustice, with the threat of nuclear war?" Archbishop Marino asked.

In his homily, the archbishop said he was proud of his black and Puerto Rican background, "just as I am sure that you who are Irish, Italian, French, German, Spanish, Anglo and Native American are proud of your identity," he said as the congregation applauded.

"We are a richer Church for all our cultural and ethnic diversity," he said. "Let our differences be a source of strength for all of us."

Speaking in Spanish, he addressed those of Cuban, Mexican, Central and South American heritage. "As your ancestors brought the faith to this continent," he told them, "you belong to the Church, and in a very special manner, the Church belongs to you."

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