

St. Petersburg welcomes Bishop Lynch

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ST. PETERSBURG

Despite admonitions that his would not be a "triumphal" entry, a spirit of pageantry was inevitable as the largest number of church hierarchy ever to assemble in Florida met in the Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle Jan. 26 for the ordination and installation of Robert Nugent Lynch as fourth bishop of the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

"Because of the powerful grace of this moment, I am no longer a stranger in your midst, but I am your friend now ready to serve, to love, to support, to lead," the newly ordained and installed Bishop Lynch told the group. "It makes no difference to me whether you are rich or poor, black, brown, white, red-skinned ... we are all friends in the Lord."

It took three separate processions for the sea of local and visiting priests and deacons, five cardinals, about a dozen archbishops and more than 50 bishops to file past the invitation-only crowd to their places in the apse of the cathedral.

The first part of the liturgy took about 90 minutes and consisted of the actual ordination of Msgr. Lynch to the office of bishop, with Archbishop John C. Favalora of Miami as principal consecrator.

The archbishop was flanked by co-consecrators Archbishop-emeritus Edward A. McCarthy of Miami and Archbishop Paul C. Marcinkus, Titular Bishop of Orta, former pro-president of the Pontifical Commission of the Vatican City State, now in retirement in Phoenix.

At the opening of the liturgy, Archbishop Favalora welcomed Bishop Lynch's family, and the many church and civic dignitaries present.

They included Bishop Anthony M. Pilla of Cleveland, who is president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, St. Petersburg Mayor David Fischer, Bishop Rogers S. Harris of the Episcopal Diocese of Southwest Florida and Rabbi Steven F. Moch of Temple Beth-El, St. Petersburg.

"And finally," the archbishop said, "to the wonderful clergy, religious and laity, the seminarians of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, I say hello again."

Archbishop Favalora said he was pleased that his first return to the St. Petersburg Diocese as head of the Florida church was to elevate Msgr. Lynch to the office of bishop, and install him as his successor and the fourth bishop of the 26-year-old diocese.

"God has provided a loving shepherd for you from among the clergy of Miami," the archbishop said. "He will love and serve you with much pastoral charity and zeal."

"My brother Robert. Today is obviously a first for you and for your family. Today is a first for me, as a principal consecrator. And today is a first for the Diocese of St. Petersburg, since you are the only one of its four bishops to be ordained here in the diocese."

Prior to reading the letter from the Holy Father commissioning Bishop Lynch as bishop of St. Petersburg, Archbishop Agostino Cacciavillan, apostolic pro-nuncio to the United States, commented on the unique presence of so



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Archbishop John C. Favalora of Miami ordains his successor for the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Bishop Robert N. Lynch.

many church hierarchy at such a function.

"Rarely you can see so many bishops and cardinals," he said. "It is an evidence of the great service of Signor Lynch as the general secretary of the episcopal conference of the United States."

"He has been a generous, faithful, loyal servant to the church, the bishops, and now the Lord is calling him to a greater service."

Weakened from his ongoing battle with pancreatic cancer, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin offered the homily at the installation.

Cardinal Bernardin was very personal in the homily for his friend of more than 25 years, referring to him as Bob several times.

After calling Bishop Lynch to "a fervent love, deeply rooted in faith" for the people he will serve as bishop, Cardinal Bernardin reminded Bishop Lynch that his "first responsibility as bishop will be to teach and preach the Word of God."

"There will be pressure to compromise, to engage in the 'soft-sell,'" the cardinal warned. "Indeed, given the critical issues we must confront today, it may well be fear that will be most seductive. Like all prophets, a bishop can expect opposition and even rejection. But we have the consolation of knowing that we are supported by God's gifts of courage, perseverance and fidelity."

"On a personal note, Bob, I can tell you that the greatest blessing that has come to me as a result of the challenges I have faced in the past two years is the experience and acknowledgment of my own vulnerability and dependence on the Lord. This has changed in many wonderful ways the manner in which I perceive the frailty and difficulties of others and minister to them. It has also

elicited a response from them I have never known before," he said.

"So, always be yourself, with all your gifts and limitations, with all your strengths and weaknesses; always acknowledge your personal dependence on the Lord, and you will be a good bishop."

Other cardinals attending were Cardinal James Hickey of Washington, D.C., Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore, Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston and Cardinal Adam Maida of Detroit.

During his remarks, Bishop Lynch also cited the friendship of many of those gathered, including Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk of Cincinnati who, Bishop Lynch said, had helped him choose his episcopal motto: *Pro Amicis Suis*. It is taken from John 15:13, which states "No greater love has anyone than they would lay down their life for one's friend."

In the moments leading to his installation, Bishop Lynch sat flanked by longtime friends Msgr. Daniel Hoye, who preceded Bishop Lynch as general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Msgr. Jude O'Doherty of the Miami Archdiocese.

After the 90-minute ordination and installation ceremonies were completed with Archbishops Favalora, McCarthy and Marcinkus leading Bishop Lynch to the cathedra, or bishop's chair, the liturgy shifted into the celebration of the Eucharist.

At the close of the liturgy, Bishop Lynch spoke briefly in Spanish, addressing representatives of the diocese's large and growing Hispanic community.

"He said he would meet with us Hispanics, helping us in our ministry," said Deacon Juan Sierra, assistant director of Hispanic Ministry for the diocese.

"He said he doesn't speak much Spanish, but he's going to learn."

"Now we leave this place to continue our friendship with the Lord and one-another," Bishop Lynch told the assembly. "I no longer feel I am a stranger, rather I know I am your friend. May God bless what has begun here today by giving to us all the gifts of faith, hope and love."

Bishop Lynch received a line of well-wishers for more than an hour during a reception in the cathedral center after his installation.

Looking tired but joyful as he left the building after 6 p.m., he was asked what his thoughts were as he lay prostrate before the altar while being ordained to the episcopacy.

"I'm exhilarated; I thought it was one of the most wonderful days of my life. Actually, I have to combine yesterday and today, because last night (Vespers Service at St. Paul Church, Tampa, for those in ministry in the St. Petersburg Diocese) was a thrill and today was just beautiful, so much warmth, so much welcome, so much friendship, so much faith — that was the thing that I liked the best."

"I was thinking of the prayers of all the people and the saints, it was a beautiful litany and," he hesitated, "actually, I was crying."

"There's a saying, you know, that goes with what's happening tonight: 'They rolled the stone before the tomb and all withdrew,'" he said, relating a verse from Scripture to how so many of those present for his installation would be leaving for distant homes.

"So when they all withdraw, I go to the office and start (the duties of a bishop). But they haven't all gone," he said with a smile. "The people of St. Petersburg are here with me."