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Wuerl Gets San Pietro in Vincoli

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 20, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

One of the highlights of a public consistory for the creation of new cardinals comes when the Holy Father announces the new cardinal's "title," that is, the church in Rome of which he is being made an honarary, or titular, pastor. It is on that basis that they have a vote for the next Pope, preserving symbolically the the ancient practice that the clergy of Rome elect the bishop of Rome.

This morning, Cardinal Wuerl was assigned the title of cardinal-priest of San Pietro in Vincoli, St. Peter in Chains, the church near the Colosseum that contains the chains that once bound St. Peter. The church's most famous feature is Michelangelo's Moses, arguably his greatest sculpture, which was originally intended as part of a larger sculputral scheme for the tomb of Pope Julius II. (Rex Harrison played Julius in "The Agony and the Ecstasy.") Julius thought well of himself and had intended his tomb to dominate the newly rebuilt St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican but his successors had other ideas. The Pope, and his monument, are now in San Pietro in Vincoli.

The most recent incumbent at San Pietro in Vincoli was Cardinal Laghi, who served many years as nuncio here in the United States. Its most famous incumbents were two Belgians. Cardinal Mercier suffered house arrest during the German Occupation in World War I, but he smuggled out a pastoral letter and came to embody Belgian resistance. His protege, Cardinal Leo Jozef Suenens, was one of the principal architects of Vatican II.

It is a plumb of a church. Congratulations Cardinal Wuerl!

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