

Pope bestows palliums on archbishops

John Thavis Catholic News Service | Jun. 29, 2011

VATICAN CITY -- Celebrating Mass with archbishops from 25 countries, Pope Benedict XVI reflected on his 60 years as a priest, calling it a demanding and "awe-inspiring" ministry that brought him closer to God.

The pope's unusually personal recollection came June 29, the anniversary of his priestly ordination in Bavaria in 1951 and the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the patron saints of Rome.

During the three-hour-long Mass, he gave 41 archbishops the woolen pallium as a sign of their communion with the pope and their pastoral responsibility as shepherds. Among them were four prelates from the United States, including Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles, and one from Canada.

The liturgy in St. Peter's Basilica began with a fanfare of trumpets. The pope smiled as he processed toward an altar ringed with flowers, pausing to greet Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

The pope devoted most of his homily to his 60 years of priestly ministry, and twice he excused himself for perhaps speaking too long about his recollections. He said he felt he had to look back on "the things that have left their mark."

"I no longer call you servants, but friends.' Sixty years on from the day of my priestly ordination, I hear once again deep within me these words of Jesus that were addressed to us new priests at the end of the ordination ceremony by the archbishop, Cardinal Faulhaber, in his slightly frail yet firm voice," the pope said.

"I knew, at that moment, the Lord himself was speaking to me in a very personal way," he said.

The pope said he felt called into the circle of those God knows in a special way, to a friendship that implies responsibilities.

"He trusts me to proclaim his word, to explain it aright and to bring it to the people of today," he said.

Pope Benedict said friendship in this sense is about conforming one's will to God and being prepared to step outside oneself and toward others -- moving "beyond the inertia of self-centeredness."

This calling of the priest to friendship with God is "so awe-inspiring that one can feel daunted as the decades go by amid so many experiences of one's own frailty and his inexhaustible goodness," he said.

The pope placed the pallium, a stole made from lamb's wool, around the shoulders of the archbishops as they knelt before him. In his sermon, the pope said the pallium signified the "yoke of friendship with Christ," the pastoral duty to be a shepherd and communion with the pope.

"It means that we must be shepherds for unity and in unity, and that it is only in the unity represented by Peter that we truly lead people to Christ," he said.

The pallium is presented every year to new archbishops or those who have been assigned to a new archdiocese. Four new archbishops -- including Archbishop Guire Poulard of Port-au-Prince, Haiti -- were unable to attend the ceremony and received their palliums at home.

In addition to Archbishop Gomez, those receiving the pallium included Archbishops Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, Gustavo Garcia-Siller of San Antonio, J. Peter Sartain of Seattle, and Gerald Lacroix of Quebec.

The four U.S. archbishops were accompanied by pilgrim groups, who participated in liturgical events for several days in Rome. Edward and Virginia Espinoza came for Archbishop Garcia-Siller, whom they met when he was a priest in Oxnard, Calif. They described him as a people person and a great speaker, whose homilies are "second to none."

"He treats everyone as the most important person in the world," Virginia Espinoza said before the start of the Mass in St. Peter's.

Speaking at his noon blessing after the Mass, Pope Benedict thanked Catholics around the world for the prayers they offered on the occasion of his 60th anniversary as a priest. At the Vatican's request, church communities around the world joined in 60 hours of eucharistic adoration to mark the anniversary.

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