

New archbishop installed in Philippines

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Archbishop Luis Tagle delivers his homily during his installation Mass inside the cathedral in Manila, Philippines, Dec. 12. (CNS photo/Noli Yamsuan, Manila Cathedral handout via Reuters)

MANILA, Philippines -- The crowded Manila cathedral erupted in applause and the choir sang "Alleluia" after the priest read the letter from the Holy See appointing Archbishop Luis Tagle the next head of the Archdiocese of Manila.

"By the leadership of your example, may the faithful entrusted to your care heed their superiors and, above all, pursue holiness of life to which we are called," read Father Rufino Sescon Jr. of the archdiocesan liturgical office. "This is the will of God: your sanctification."

Cardinal Gaudencio Rosales, retired archbishop of Manila, handed over the seat of the archdiocese to Archbishop Tagle.

"The bishops, the clergy, the religious and the laity of the metropolitan Archdiocese of Manila now welcome your 32nd shepherd," Cardinal Rosales proclaimed to the overflowing crowd of around 2,000, including the U.S. and Swiss ambassadors to the Philippines and bishops from at least five Asian countries.

A long line of clergy, religious and laypeople snaked its way to the altar to pay homage to Archbishop Tagle. The laity included members of the marginalized segment of the population, for which the archbishop is a major advocate.

During his homily, the new archbishop, whom many call humble, asked: "Is this occasion really about me? I know many people are asking, 'Who is this new archbishop of Manila? What is he like? What are his vision and plans?'

"But, like John the Baptist, I am inviting you to focus on the one mightier than all of us: Jesus Christ the risen one, and the true shepherd of the church," he said.

Archbishop Tagle called on the faithful to look at reality through Jesus' eyes.

"Then we see differently," he said. "A child, especially, the unborn, is no longer seen as a burden, but a gift. The youth are not a problem but a promise. Women are not objects but persons. Laborers are not machines but partners. The poor are not a nuisance but our jewels, and creation is not an object of manipulation but a sign of God's sustaining love."

With this statement, Archbishop Tagle reiterated the church's stance on issues related to reproduction, which Philippine lawmakers are currently grappling with in proposed legislation on reproductive health.

Many are looking to the new head of the influential Manila Archdiocese to unite the church, which some feel is being segmented by the issue in this predominantly Catholic country. The proposed measures call for providing full access and government assistance to the poor to pay for contraception such as intrauterine devices, birth control pills and condoms. While abortion is against the law in the Philippines, the proposals would require medical treatment for women who suffer complications from illegal abortions. The bills also allow health workers who are conscientious objectors to refer patients to someone else in nonemergency cases.

Days after he was named, Archbishop Tagle said he was overwhelmed by his new assignment, but he kept his mission in perspective in his homily.

"Love makes one a true shepherd, not position," he said, drawing enthusiastic applause. "I pray that my episcopal ministry and all ministries in the church may be rooted in humble and loving discipleship. I tell myself as though it were the Lord telling me, 'Chito, do not think you have become great because of your new position. Be great rather in being a beloved and loving disciple of the Lord.'"

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