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New El Paso bishop sees a diocese 'deeply committed to Catholic faith'

Andy Sparke Catholic News Service | Jul. 11, 2013
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Bishop Mark Seitz promised to lead his flock into a new century characterized by the new evangelization as he was installed as bishop of the nearly 100-year-old diocese of El Paso.

In a homily presented in both English and Spanish, Seitz addressed more than 4,000 people who attended the installation Mass Tuesday in the grand hall of the El Paso Convention and Performing Arts Center.

He promised to listen for the voice of the Lord in the words of the priests, the deacons, the laity "and the voices of the poor, for I am sure he will speak through them."

"I will have confidence in the voice of Holy Father Francis and the magisterium of the church," he said.

Msgr. Jean-Francois Lantheaume, charge d'affaires at the apostolic nunciature in Washington, read the message from Pope Francis relieving Seitz of his duties as auxiliary bishop of Dallas and appointing him the sixth bishop of the El Paso diocese. His appointment was announced May 6.

San Antonio Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller conducted the installation rite, which was attended by Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the retired archbishop of Washington, and 22 archbishops and bishops from Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Oklahoma, California, Louisiana, Wyoming, Illinois and Nebraska.

In his homily, Seitz recounted his visits to parts of the El Paso diocese in the time since his appointment was announced and said, "I can see the diocese is deeply committed to the Catholic faith."

Noting that the city of El Paso derives its name from El Paso del Norte, "the pass of the north" traveled by early Spanish explorers and missionaries, he said it has long been a beacon for "refugees and immigrants, people so dear to the Lord."

Next March, the diocese of El Paso will mark the 100th anniversary of its founding by Pope Pius X. Made up of 10 counties covering 26,700 square miles in the western tip of Texas between New Mexico and Mexico, the diocese has a Catholic population of more than 650,000.

Seitz told those gathered for his installation, "I will call you to open a new chapter in the history of the diocese in this new century."

"The world needs the testimony of faith now more than ever," he said. "This is the time for the new evangelization."

More than 800 Catholics from the diocese faithful filled St. Patrick Cathedral to overflowing for the vespers service the evening before the installation of the new bishop.

Bishop Armando Ochoa of Fresno, Calif., apostolic administrator of El Paso and former bishop of the diocese,

met Seitz at the door of the cathedral and led him toward the altar amid long applause from those in attendance. Ochoa was named to Fresno in December 2011.

The diocesan choir led an enthusiastic congregation in singing the psalms and hymns for the service.

In his homily, Seitz said his appointment as new bishop of El Paso was both a "great surprise and great joy."

He told the gathering he was ambitious to be a saint "like Father Pedro de Jesus Maldonado who was ordained in this cathedral." Maldonado was martyred in the Mexican state of Chihuahua in the 1930s and canonized by Pope John Paul II.

Noting that he would become shepherd of the El Paso diocese on the following day, Seitz said any shepherd cannot reach his goal alone, but must be accompanied by this flock.

"We are going to be connected in the pilgrimage" toward holiness, he said. "I hope that I can help you with the model of my life and preaching."

He said, "I hope to help you to work through this life with more joy and more peace."

Seitz promised "all I have received in the service of God here in the diocese of El Paso."

"It is a great honor," he said, "to be here in this great diocese of El Paso where the evangelization of Texas began," he said, referring to the early Spanish missionaries who established the missions in the diocese in the 1600s; missions which are still active parishes today.

Earlier in the day, Seitz and members of his family were guests of honor at a luncheon hosted by the Native American Tigua Tribe, whose home parish is the Ysleta Mission in El Paso's Lower Valley.

The bishop was greeted by members of the tribal council, honored with a presentation of the Eagle Dance, and joined tribal members and guests in dancing a community round dance.

"I want every Catholic in El Paso to be an evangelizer," the bishop said. "Together we will announce a new path that leads us to God."

[Andy Sparke is editor of Rio Grande Catholic, newspaper of the Diocese of El Paso, Texas.]

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