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New Oregon auxiliary bishop thanks people for inspiring his ministry

Ed Langlois Catholic News Service | Apr. 30, 2014
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The Portland archdiocese's new auxiliary bishop, the first in 36 years, credited the people of the diocese for building his faith and inspiring his work during his episcopal ordination.

"I didn't get here on my own," Bishop Peter Smith told the congregation, which filled St. Mary's Cathedral in Portland to overflowing for a Mass that lasted two and a half hours Tuesday. "I got here because of all of you and many more besides."

In brief comments, the new bishop thanked his family, the People of Praise faith community, the priests in his life and the lay faithful at parishes where he has served. He asked for prayers, especially that his heart grow in love for the People of God.

When he took his official bishops' chair, the congregation erupted in a long round of applause. The former South African Army rifleman looked uncomfortable with the attention, but soldiered on.

During his homily, Archbishop Alexander Sample offered a teaching on the rite of a bishop's ordination and exhorted Smith to let the prayers and promises sink in deeply.

"We hope the power of the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon you in a powerful way to assist you," the archbishop said, turning to look at his No. 2 man, who has served the archdiocese as vicar general and moderator of the curia.

Sample said Smith "already has proven to be a trusted and invaluable co-worker" and closed his homily by offering him a quote from St. Catherine of Siena: "If you are what you should be, you will set the whole world on fire."

Msgr. John Cihak, an Oregon priest who serves with the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops, read a letter from Pope Francis naming Smith. The pope urged the new bishop to "strengthen continually the bond to your archbishop" and suggested devotion to Mary as a model of selfless faith and service.

"I think this is amazing. It's a big responsibility," said Smith's mother, Joicelyn Smith, who came from South Africa for the ordination and proclaimed the first reading. She said, looking back, that she is not surprised at her son's path into Catholic leadership. He was a dedicated altar server and a "keen" member of a Catholic association of university students. She observed that joining the Brotherhood of the People of Praise, a private association of the faithful, set him on a course of lifelong service in the church.

The new bishop's sister, Michele Wing, and other siblings have razzed him, letting him know he may be a prelate, but he's still just their brother. At the same time, Wing said, his spiritual journey has further unified an already close family.

"I think he leaves us all very humbled by this," she said, explaining that her brother's authenticity seems to be what led to his selection by Pope Francis. "He is like the boy next door," Wing said. "He is so down to earth. People really relate to him."

More than 175 clergy attended to liturgy. Bishops came from surrounding dioceses and abbots from local monasteries.

Young people were on hand, allowed to duck out of school early. Two teens sat in a rear row.

"I know he's going to make a great bishop," said Noelle Duran, a Central Catholic High School student who attended Archbishop Howard School when Smith was pastor at St. Rose Parish. Kendra Berkins, an Archbishop Howard graduate who now attends St. Mary's Academy, offered this assessment of her former pastor: "He's funny, but kind, and very wise."

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