

3,400 attend Mass to welcome diocese's seventh bishop

written by Tara Little |



The drought is over. After two years, the Diocese of Little Rock finally has a new bishop, and his name is Anthony Basil Taylor.

Reflecting the mood of the assembly, Msgr. J. Gaston Hebert, diocesan administrator, could not hide his jubilation as he presented the bishop-elect for ordination, calling him “the answer to our prayers.”

He told Oklahoma City Archbishop Eusebius J. Beltran “the faithful of the Diocese of Little Rock have eagerly awaited a new shepherd for two years like dry weary land without water, and no one has been more thirsty than I.” Laughter and applause followed breaking the solemn tone of the occasion.

More than 3,400 people attended the celebration held in the Governor’s Hall of the Statehouse Convention Center in Little Rock June 5.

Bishop Taylor, 54, formerly a priest for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, was named the seventh bishop of Little Rock on April 10.

During his homily, Archbishop Beltran, the principal consecrator for the ordination, described the role of a bishop before turning his attention to Bishop Taylor.

The Lord is “appointing you a successor of his apostles with the same assurance that he gave them. ‘I will be with you always.’ ... As a man of faith, sacrifice and prayer, rely on the Lord God always and he will never abandon you,” the archbishop said.

He told the bishop-elect that he would not be alone in his ministry because the Lord is not “sending you into a barren desert, but to a well cultivated field” of faith and Catholic tradition. “Bishop Taylor, I want you to look, because here are some of the many people waiting anxiously to help you,” Archbishop Beltran said.

Addressing the assembly, he said, “I know you welcome your new bishop with great enthusiasm. ... I would like to show him your willingness to be an active contributor to the good work he has committed to as bishop of Little Rock.”

The archbishop then asked Catholics from Arkansas to stand as they were called. First, it was the priests, then religious men and women, deacons, catechists, Catholic school teachers and diocesan and parish staff. He continued until he humorously pointed out that the only people left sitting were “the Oklahoma people.”

“Bishop Taylor, we promise you our prayers and our support as you now prepare for this ordination. May the good Lord bless you now and always,” he said.

Co-consecrators were Bishops J. Peter Sartain of Joliet, Ill. and Edward Slattery of Tulsa, Okla. Archbishop Beltran ordained Bishop Sartain, the sixth bishop of Little Rock, in 2000. He served the diocese until 2006 when Pope Benedict XVI appointed him to the Joliet Diocese. Since then, the Diocese of Little Rock has been without a bishop and Msgr. Hebert, served as diocesan administrator.

At the end of the Mass, Bishop Taylor addressed his new flock in English and Spanish.

“In all of you I have experienced what Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12:26, ‘If one of the parts of the Body of Christ are honored, all the parts share its joy.’” he said to loud applause.

“For that too I feel humbled and grateful. My one request is that you pray for me and our Diocese of Little Rock, that God will make me a good bishop, holy and wise, faithful to the Lord, whatever the cost.”

Turning his attention to the priests of Arkansas, he said, “You are now my priests. You share in my priesthood. I am convinced that together we’ll be able to do great things for the Lord, great things for the Church, great things for the people of Arkansas, so long as we remain faithful to Jesus and seek to follow his way of truth and life.”



To hear an excerpt from Bishop Taylor’s ordination service, [click here](#) to go to the bishop’s audio page.