



“Some Seeds Fell on Good Ground”

February 23, 2009

Feast of St. Polycarp

Year of St. Paul

Dear Friends united in love and service of Jesus Christ and His Church:

Yes, I realize these weekly communications with you usually come on Tuesday, but, I want to share with you word of an announcement to be made today.

At noon in Rome (5 a.m. our time), the Vatican will announce that Pope Benedict XVI has named me Archbishop of New York.

Today, I am in New York for the official announcement, media conference, and a day full of meetings and visits.

The installation, please God, will be on April 15, 2009, Wednesday of Easter Week.

So, there you have it. There has been, as you know, a lot of speculation about this for over a year. I have constantly responded to teasing and questions about these rumors with, “I don’t know anything about it. I want to stay right here in Milwaukee.”

I was not fibbing. It was only recently that I was told of this appointment. It’s hardly a position one applies for! I was surprised, and still am. I was not asked if I would accept the position. The Papal Nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Pietro Sambi, gently informed me, “The Holy Father has appointed you Archbishop of New York.”

Do I want to go? Do I consider myself qualified? Are there much better candidates for the position?

All of that is really beside the point. The obedience I freely and enthusiastically promised to Jesus Christ, His Church, and His vicar on earth, our Holy Father, is a very liberating act. So, I place my future in the hands of the Lord, whose grace and mercy endure forever, and I go.

As Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta encouraged, "Let God use you without consulting you."

I am honored by this appointment, as I was by my appointment as Archbishop of Milwaukee, deeply grateful for the confidence of Pope Benedict XVI, and filled with hope as I anticipate serving the historic, vibrant Archdiocese of New York.

Yet, I must admit sadness in the prospect of leaving you. In my brief six-and-a-half years as your pastor, I have come to know, love and appreciate you very much. I am at home here. It will be very tough to leave.

As you've heard me say so often, in the end, it's not about me or us at all: it's all about Jesus and His Church.

The bustling life and promising initiatives of this great Archdiocese of Milwaukee go on as strong as ever: our parishes, schools, religious formation, outreach in charity and justice, our prayer, worship, rich sacramental life and quest for holiness, our evangelization, support of marriage and family, promotion of the culture of life, encouragement of vocations, and our fostering of stewardship in our Faith in Our Future Capital Campaign and 2009 Catholic Stewardship Appeal -- this all goes on full-speed ahead, because none of this depends on me, but on Jesus Christ, and your faith in His promise to remain with us forever.

In forty-eight hours we begin Lent. I'll be with you here as your archbishop throughout these forty days. I'll need Lent's invitation to more intense prayer, penance, and acts of charity more than ever as I open myself to the grace and mercy of Christ on the cross. I ask you, please, to pray with and for me.

Tuesday I'm back with you, because I can't find a Paczki in New York!