

'Let us start afresh from Christ'

Archbishop Thomas Wenski exhorts Catholics to enter public square, revitalize their faith

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MIAMI — The deluge let up just as the festivities began.

Two hours later, Archbishop Thomas Wenski emerged from St. Mary Cathedral into bright sunlight, having officially been installed as Miami's fourth archbishop.

On a rain-soaked June 1 — the first day of the hurricane season, as the archbishop himself noted — this descendant of Polish immigrants — a man born during a hurricane — became the first native son to take the staff as chief shepherd of south Florida's 1.3 million Catholics.

"Hopefully, this is not a prophecy," Archbishop Wenski joked as the rains fell earlier in the day, during a brunch for bishops, friends and family members that preceded the installation Mass.

The downpours reminded Father John McLaughlin, a retired archdiocesan priest, of the days of the late Archbishop Edward McCarthy, whose tenure as Miami's second archbishop always seemed to be "blessed", as he put it, by rain.

It was obvious, however, as he stepped onto the drenched red carpet leading up to the cathedral doors, that Archbishop Wenski will add his own inimitable touch to his tenure here: He will not mince words and he will have plenty to say.

An outspoken advocate of immigrants and human rights since his days as a priest among Miami's Haitian community, the new archbishop paused for impromptu news conferences both before making his way into the cathedral and afterward.

He preached his homily in fluent English, Spanish and Creole — the three languages he learned while growing up in Lake Worth, attending the seminary in Miami and working as a priest in Little Haiti.

He urged south Florida's Catholics to "involve themselves in the public square and do so coherently and unapologetically."

He told them that "the sins" that weaken the Church from inside can only be healed by conversion, by focusing on "no other treasure but that: the gift of encounter with Jesus Christ."

He summarized the Church's social justice teachings in five words: "No man is a problem," adding, "When we see another human being as a problem, we often give ourselves permission to look for expedient but not just solutions."

He also told Miami's Catholics, buffeted in recent months by financial woes that forced the merging of parishes, the closings of schools and the shuttering of ministries, not to "feel sorry for ourselves. Our brothers and sisters in Haiti, Cuba and elsewhere have challenges much more daunting than our own — with far less resources than we have."

“We begin a new chapter in the history of this local Church,” Archbishop Wenski concluded, “and so, this is the time for us all – priests, deacons, religious and members of Christ’s faithful – to assess our fervor and to find fresh enthusiasm for the spiritual and pastoral responsibilities that lie ahead of us... Let us start afresh from Christ.”