News

Denver Archbishop James R. Golka reacts during his installation Mass in CoBank Arena at the

Denver Archbishop James R. Golka reacts during his installation Mass in CoBank Arena at the National Western Complex in Denver March 25, 2026. Archbishop Golka was previously bishop of Colorado Springs, and in Denver he succeeds Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila. (OSV News photo/Grant Whitty, Denver Catholic)

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March 25: a day of intense joy for the global Church. The day when Mary's "yes" echoed through eternity, bringing forth humanity's savior.

In a homily on this very day, St. Bernard of Clairvaux emphatically describes how the world waited with bated breath for Mary's response. Her "yes" evoked an explosive, near-incomparable joy in heaven.

But this March 25, there was a measure of that transformative joy as the Archdiocese of Denver welcomed its ninth bishop and sixth archbishop, Archbishop James R. Golka, amid the devoted prayers and ecstatic applause of thousands gathered at the CoBank Arena at the National Western Complex in Denver.

"Pope Leo has blessed our church with a new archbishop, one whose heart is deeply conformed to the heart of Christ, one who has a deep love for our Blessed Mother, whose feast of the Annunciation of the Lord we celebrate today," said now-retired Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila as he introduced his successor during the Installation Mass.

"It is under her mantle and her protection, especially under her title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, that I place the entire Archdiocese of Denver, and especially Archbishop Golka, as he begins his ministry here," he said.

Officially taking up the pastoral care of the local church, Golka received the apostolic letter of Pope Leo XIV, proclaimed and delivered by Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the outgoing apostolic nuncio to the United States.

"In the providence of God, you are called to this new responsibility," the cardinal told the new archbishop. "Your ministry has been marked by attentiveness to the will of God and a life rooted in prayer. You have spoken of the importance of listening, first to the Lord, and then to those entrusted to your care. This discernment, this docility, to the voice of God will be essential as you begin your ministry here."

With his profession of faith and oath of fidelity during solemn vespers the previous evening, and his presenting the apostolic letter to the archdiocese, receiving the crosier, or shepherd's staff, and being enthroned in the cathedra, the bishop's chair, Golka officially took the helm of Colorado's largest diocese.

His mission received, the new archbishop was quick to give the faithful across the archdiocese their own: Know Jesus, love Jesus and preach Jesus.

"Every Mass is a stronger encounter, communion with our Lord Jesus Christ. Every Mass should send us forth on mission. We are not Catholics who sit around. We are Catholics on mission to go out and do what God wants us to do. Each individual, each marriage, each family, each parish, each diocese, and the whole Catholic Church," Golka said. "We are made for mission. The mission is God's. God thinks enough of us to recruit us and to call us to follow Christ and to live for his purposes.

I'm all in, I'm ready. How about you?"

Clergymen pray as Denver Archbishop James R. Golka celebrates his installation Mass in CoBa

Clergymen pray as Denver Archbishop James R. Golka celebrates his installation Mass in CoBank Arena at the National Western Complex in Denver March 25, 2026. (OSV News photo/Grant Whitty, Denver Catholic)

But that mission necessitates more than mere words, the archbishop noted. It requires an intimacy with Christ that impels.

"I think Catholics are experts at going through the motions. Let's stop that right now," Golka challenged those gathered. "When you pray the Our Father, you're in front of the Father who made you. Jesus is with you; it is his prayer. Pray it like he would pray it. Don't go through the motions anymore."

The danger of not drawing near to Jesus in prayer is real, Golka emphasized. In fact, it's his biggest fear as the newly installed Archbishop of Denver.

"Now, brothers and sisters, as your archbishop, what fears me the most is if you do not let Christ claim you," he shared. "If you do not let him claim you every day, as Catholics, if you're never going into the confessional, never receiving the Holy Communion, never talking to him before you bless a meal, I'm afraid at that moment of your death, you might be utterly alone, and that would be terrifying. Let Christ claim you. That will make all the difference in the world."

Indeed, if the entire people of God throughout Northern Colorado took this call seriously, the archbishop said, the state, archdiocese and world would be a profoundly different – and more Christlike – place.

"As your archbishop, my plan, my dream, my goal for this archdiocese is that each Christian, each day, has a goal of listening well to the will of God to understand and say yes to his plan. Imagine our archdiocese, our state, if every Christian, every Catholic were trying to live according to the will of God, not just ours. Imagine how God can change our state, our archdiocese and our lives," he said.

For the thousands gathered, "who are here for joining me to implore God's help for me and for our diocese," as Golka said in his homily, the installation Mass was a

moment of profound grace.

The newly minted honorary members of the Golka (spiritual) family, adopted by the new archbishop himself in his homily, couldn't help but feel excitement, hope and gratitude in welcoming their new shepherd.

"Thanks be to God, because he's given us a new archbishop, a shepherd for our Church in Denver. It's a blessing," Sister Claudia with the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit, told Denver Catholic, the archdiocesan news outlet.

"It was marvelous. I feel really hopeful to have met our new archbishop. I feel really blessed to have received his first blessing at Mass. Everything was really beautiful," added Felipe Avina, a parishioner at Queen of Peace Parish in Aurora.

"Archbishop Golka's new start gives me a lot of hope, especially with everything he's gone through before getting to this point, with his mom and dad passing away," shared Mina Gutierrez, a parishioner of St. Michael Parish in Aurora. "But it gave me a lot of joy to see his family, who came to support him."

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Golka's father, Robert, died March 5 at age 92. He had joined the archbishop and a number of the archbishop's 10 siblings at a Feb. 7 press conference about his son's appointment to head the Denver Archdiocese announced that day. The archbishop's mother, Patricia, died in January.

"I feel a lot of hope for the Hispanic community," Gutierrez added, "especially as he (Golka) entrusted himself to Our Lady of Guadalupe in his words in Spanish."

In short, explained Betty Scheetz, a parishioner of St. John XXIII Parish in Fort Collins, "It's just good to be Catholic and be able to celebrate something this spectacular."

The energy in the CoBank Arena was electric all day long, with the thousands in attendance eagerly welcoming their new spiritual father. When asked what welcome message they had following Mass, the faithful couldn't contain their enthusiasm.

Amid all the excitement was a bittersweet twinge, especially for those faithful from the Diocese of Colorado Springs who were losing their beloved shepherd. Yet, for Chris Scurto, the chairman of the diocese's Catholic Foundation, any tears shed were

rooted in gratitude and enthusiasm for the Denver Archdiocese.

"I've had the lovely experience of working with Archbishop Golka now for four years. He's meant so much to me," he shared. "He's made me a better Catholic. He's made me want to be a better Catholic. And I certainly appreciate his stewardship, his shepherding, his humility and his love. Today, my tears are tears of joy for the Archdiocese of Denver. You're so lucky to have this man leading you."

As he begins his ministry as the head shepherd of the Archdiocese of Denver, Golka only has one agenda item in mind: Listen to God, as the Virgin Mary did.

"On this day of the Annunciation, the Archangel Gabriel said to Mary, ‘God has a plan for you, a plan to receive a powerful baby called Son of God, Jesus Christ. Mary says she does not understand, but the angel says it's God's plan. And how does Mary respond? Yes," Golka explained.

"For me, this is very important because it's the center of the Christian and Catholic life. We must learn to say yes to the will of God," he continued. "But, to say yes, we first must listen to the Word of God to understand his will, his plan. And when we can listen and receive his will, his plan, we can say yes and live that yes."

But that "yes" is not – cannot – be a one-and-done reality.

"This consent must be given over and over and again. That's why our Catholic faith says, practice your faith. That will help you be claimed my Christ," Golka noted, pointing to Eve's listening to the devil, and Mary's listening to God, becoming the New Eve. "The enemy continues to talk and tempt us in our world today. Believe me, I know it, I have felt it. I'm not afraid of Satan. I'm afraid of not looking at Jesus."