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First Indianapolis auxiliary since 1933 ordained

Sean Gallagher Catholic News Service | Mar. 7, 2011

INDIANAPOLIS -- A witness to mystery.

That is how Indianapolis Archbishop Daniel M. Buechlein described Bishop Christopher J. Coyne in a homily that he delivered just minutes before he ordained the Boston archdiocesan priest as the first auxiliary bishop for the church in central and southern Indiana since 1933.

"In a secularized world that believes only in what it sees, by your consecration and by what you do, Bishop Coyne, you will be a witness to mystery," Archbishop Buechlein said during the March 2 liturgy at St. John the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis. "The very life and identity of a bishop -- and of priests -- are rooted in the order of faith, the order of the unseen and not in the secular order of values."

In a sense, the 1,000 people who filled the oldest Catholic church in Indianapolis also witnessed mystery during the two-hour ordination Mass.

When Archbishop Buechlein, co-ordaining Bishops Paul D. Etienne of Cheyenne, Wyo., and Richard G. Lennon of Cleveland, and the 15 other bishops present for the liturgy prayerfully laid their hands on the head of Bishop Coyne, they continued a ritual that the apostles themselves used to call down the Holy Spirit upon those who would succeed them in their mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all nations.

"We can all be good administrators, liturgists, preachers, healers, teachers, good and friendly guys," Bishop Coyne said in remarks after Communion. "But if we're not about spreading the good news of salvation in and through the Catholic Church, then we've missed the point of our ministry."

Pope Benedict XVI named him an auxiliary bishop for Indianapolis Jan. 14. The pope noted in his letter of appointment, read at the start of the ordination rite, that Bishop Coyne was "endowed with ... outstanding qualities of mind and heart as well as pastoral experience" that made him "suitable for undertaking that office."

Toward the end of his homily, Archbishop Buechlein summarized for Bishop Coyne all of the various tasks of the office for which he was about to be ordained.

"Bishops are called to live the simple life of the Gospel in a way that somehow mirrors Jesus, the one who serves," Archbishop Buechlein said. "Wouldn't you agree that, when all is said and done, what our church needs more than anything from us bishops and priests is integrity and holiness?

"The church needs us to be no-nonsense, down-to-earth, holy, spiritual and moral leaders who are who we claim to be. With Jesus, in Jesus and for Jesus, that is the ultimate service, the ultimate witness to the unity of faith."

The ordination rite that followed included many ancient rituals in addition to the laying on of hands.

While Archbishop Buechlein and the co-ordaining bishops prayed the prayer of ordination, two deacons held an open Book of the Gospels over Bishop Coyne's head as a symbol of the pre-eminent importance of

evangelization in the ministry of a bishop.

Archbishop Buechlein later anointed Bishop Coyne's head with sacred chrism oil and gave him the insignia of bishops -- an episcopal ring, miter and crosier.

Although such symbols mark the distinctiveness of Bishop Coyne's ministry, he called all present at the Mass to work with him in fulfilling that ministry.

"My friends, we can never lose sight of the fact that the mission of this church is about salvation, whether we are ordained, religious, or lay men and women," Bishop Coyne said. "Each of us in our own way is asked to participate in spreading the good news. As it has in the past, and as it is now, all that we do as Christians must be formed by this truth of the faith."

He also described the many places and ways in which that good news is shared with others.

"We proclaim this Gospel from the pulpit, the altar and the baptismal font," Bishop Coyne said. "We proclaim this Gospel at the hospital bedside, the dining room table, the school classroom, the university hall, the senior center and the nursing home. We proclaim this Gospel on the phone, in e-mail and on the blog."

And, in a humorous aside, he said, "By the way, if you want the address to my blog, just ask."

That line was one of many that elicited laughter during Bishop Coyne's remarks. His lighter side came through, especially in the thanks he gave to various people in his life, including his family, many of whom were present at the liturgy.

"To my brothers and sisters, my aunts and uncles, my nieces and nephews and all my cousins that are here, I salute you with a proper Boston salute, 'You are wicked awesome!'" said Bishop Coyne with a particularly thick Boston accent.

But he concluded on a serious note, describing himself as a servant to the church, "as a brother who walks with you, and as someone who seeks to be a friend to all. ... I promise that I will try and do all that is possible to be a shepherd after God's own heart."

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