

Atlanta's new archbishop is installed in quiet ceremony

ATLANTA (CNS) – In the silence of the Cathedral of Christ the King, Archbishop Gregory J. Hartmayer was installed May 6 as leader of the 1.2 million Catholics in the Archdiocese of Atlanta, telling believers they must care for each other without limit.

Speaking for the first time as the seventh archbishop of Atlanta, he said: “This cathedral is empty. And yet it is filled with the presence of the guiding force of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised his disciples he would send them to give them the gifts they needed to continue to guide his flock. And so, the tradition continues.”

The installation Mass looked unlike any other in the 64-year history of the church in Atlanta. It overturned what's typically a ceremony of ancient prayers, attended by throngs of people spilling out of pews, with civic and interfaith leaders greeting the new spiritual leader. Amid the coronavirus pandemic that has killed more than 1,300 people and infected some 30,500 in Georgia, the group in the cathedral was limited to a dozen people, keeping apart from each other, replacing handshakes and hugs with bows, with one participant wearing a mask.

The hour and a half ceremony in the Gothic mother church of the archdiocese began with the archbishop outside its wooden doors, knocking three times to gain admittance.

Absent were the hundreds of priests and bishops who traditionally lead a new archbishop into the church. Instead, Archbishop Hartmayer followed several deacons, priests, four bishops and a laywoman down the long center aisle.

Participating by video was the pope's ambassador to the United

States, Archbishop Christophe Pierre and Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory, former archbishop of Atlanta, who is now Archbishop of Washington.

“I’ve prayed that Pope Francis would send you a loving and generous servant minister to work with you in building up the body of Christ, that is the Archdiocese of Atlanta,” said Archbishop Gregory in his message to the Catholics of the archdiocese. “And my prayers have been answered.”

Archbishop Pierre told the faithful of Atlanta that Pope Francis remains close to them.

“He has given you a shepherd who will watch over the flock and nourish you with the word and sacrament, in fact, and not merely virtually,” he said.

The Mass was broadcast on EWTN and the Catholic Television Network, as well as livestreamed.

Pope Francis appointed Archbishop Hartmayer as archbishop on March 5 to fill the vacancy created when Archbishop Gregory was named to the Archdiocese of Washington last April.

A Conventual Franciscan, Archbishop Hartmayer is a native of Buffalo, New York. He professed his solemn vows as a friar in 1973 and was ordained a priest in 1979. A longtime Catholic educator, Archbishop Hartmayer was named pastor of St. Philip Benizi Church in Jonesboro, Georgia in 1995, and served at the parish for 15 years. In July 2010, he was appointed pastor of St. John Vianney parish in Lithia Springs, Georgia, until being named the 14th Bishop of Savannah, on July 19, 2011, by Pope Benedict XVI.

On the eve of his installation and 41st anniversary of ordination to the priesthood, Archbishop Hartmayer gathered with clergy, religious and laity for solemn vespers at the cathedral.

“An empty cathedral may seem to some like a pretty disappointing way to begin this new ministry,” said Archbishop Hartmayer, but he decided, instead, to view it as an opportunity.

“I see this empty cathedral as a call to action, a stark and powerful reminder of what could happen if we let up, even for a moment – if we ever get complacent or begin to take all he has given us for granted.”

At the vespers, Archbishop Hartmayer asked Catholics to be “living stones” for others.

“Recommit to deepening your own precious faith in Jesus Christ so that your children and your grandchildren cannot help but see every day that you have found comfort, contentment and boundless joy in worshipping the one who made us,” said the archbishop.

“Become a beacon to all who are seeking, especially those under your own roof,” he added. “And we will never have to worry about empty churches, unfilled pews for those heartbreaking vacancies in your own family’s row.”

As the world continues to practice social distancing, Archbishop Hartmayer asked livestream viewers to reflect on lessons learned during this time of physical separation.

This experience could lead to a deep appreciation for the Eucharist which has been given to us, as we prepare to return gradually and deliberately to communal worship and ecclesial life, he said.

“My sincere prayer for the church, once this pandemic is contained and we are able to congregate again without risk, is ... the people of God will arise on the first morning, the first Sunday morning that public Masses resume, excited about the prospect of reconvening with their faith community at the Lord’s table,” said Archbishop Hartmayer. “It will be like the

Easter we wish we could've celebrated this year."