

EDITORS: For those of you planning to publish after February 27, permission is granted to alter the verb tense where appropriate, mainly paragraphs 1-3.

Entre Amigos – Opinion/Commentary

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José, Archbishop of Los Angeles

By Mar Muñoz-Visoso

February 27 2011, will be a memorable day for Catholics in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles: its first Hispanic archbishop officially takes over the reins of the largest diocese in the country.

A simple “Ceremony of Transition” at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Angels—celebrated twice, at the 10 a.m. Mass in English and at the 12:30 Mass in Spanish — will mark the official beginning of Archbishop José Horacio Gomez’s tenure as shepherd-in-chief.

Gone are the pomp and noise of last May’s warm welcome to the coadjutor archbishop. Gone are too the visitors from throughout the United States, and beyond, for the emotional ceremony. Now it is the turn of the faithful in Los Angeles to accompany both their shepherds in a more intimate ceremony, to bid farewell to the one who has been their pastor and guide for 25 years, Cardinal Roger Mahony, and to welcome the one who will take over that charge, Archbishop José Gomez.

Those of us who have had the honor to work closely with Archbishop Gomez are happy that the Holy Father has entrusted such responsibility to a man whom we know and profoundly admire. Latinos, particularly, are proud that Pope Benedict has tapped one of their own for that job; I’ve heard more than one spontaneous and celebratory “it was about time” that the U.S. diocese with the largest number of Latinos and Spanish-speakers per square foot had a Hispanic archbishop.

On the national scene, Archbishop Gomez is well known and deeply involved in numerous projects and activities. He is chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee on Migration and of the Sub-committee for the Church in Latin America; a member of the Doctrine Committee; and was founding chairman of the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church. He serves on the board of two seminaries and is episcopal moderator of ANSH (the National Association of Hispanic Priests) and of La Red (a national Catholic network of Hispanic youth and young adult ministers). He is also a founding member of the Catholic Association of Latino Leaders (CALL). For a biography see <http://abpgomez.la-archdiocese.org/bio.html>.

The change of the guard is usually a very important moment in the life of a diocese, especially one as large and diverse as Los Angeles. It will be interesting to see whether the complexity of his new position will allow Archbishop Gomez to continue participation in many of these other activities.

“Monseñor José,” as many address him in Spanish, is well aware that a shepherd’s first charge is his own sheep. If past experience serves as an indicator, the people of Los Angeles can expect an archbishop with a conciliatory style, who will first listen and observe and, then, will try to win minds and hearts one at a time. In his own way, slowly and smoothly but firmly, the José Gomez we’ve come to know will make his pastoral priorities known to his new flock. Vocations, access to education—particularly Catholic education— solid faith and pastoral formation in the archdiocesan leadership, pro-life causes, immigrants’ rights, as well as a pastoral solicitude for the moral and spiritual wellbeing of his priests are sure to be on the list.

Regardless, Archbishop Gomez is going to need all the help and prayers that the faithful, his friends and any person of good will can offer him. In his life as a priest and bishop, he has made many friendships and left a deep mark the people’s hearts. I hope many of them are going to keep Our Lady of Guadalupe very busy, asking her to intercede for the pastoral success of one her sons, this Mexican expatriate called to serve the universal Church and, now, the Catholic faithful of Los Angeles.

I am glad to join them. *Dios te salve María, llena eres de gracia...*

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