

## de Souza: Archbishop's installation is a time to look at where he has his seat

Archbishop Michael Mulhall, our new chief shepherd in Kingston, Ont., was installed on the feast of Philip and James, May 3. It was a fittingly grand occasion, with much joy among the priests and the people at receiving our new archbishop.

But as grand an occasion as an installation is, the actual ritual is about as simple as it gets. The new archbishop, the papal bull of appointment having been read, is escorted to his seat, his *cathedra*. Then he sits down. The ritual is complete.

*Cathedra* is the Latin word for chair, and it is from *cathedra* that we get the English word cathedral. A cathedral is not a cathedral because it is grand or beautiful or historic, though in Ontario our cathedrals generally fit that bill. A cathedral is the church where the bishop's seat is, and his *cathedra* is the symbol of his authority and his mission as the centre of unity in the diocese.

There is nothing like an installation to emphasize the importance of the *cathedra*. Indeed, the word "installation" itself is a bit weak for what is taking place, given that one "installs" a new software upgrade or an air conditioner.

Byzantine Catholics speak of an "enthronement," which is more majestic, and has the benefit of calling attention to the throne, or *cathedra*, itself.

The installation got me thinking about that *cathedra*. It was splendid to see Archbishop Mulhall there, flanked by his predecessor, Archbishop Brendan O'Brien, and the papal nuncio, Archbishop Luigi Bonazzi.

But I wonder if bishops think about what the cathedral looks like most of the time, when they are not there. When the bishop is present the *cathedra* is occupied; when he is not present, the *cathedra* is vacant.

Indeed, we use that term, *sede vacante*, to describe the time when a diocese does not have a bishop. Obviously, when the bishop is elsewhere in the diocese the *cathedra* is empty, but it does not indicate a *sede vacante*. The bishop has many duties, many of which take him away from the cathedral.

At the same time, though, most cathedrals – including ours in Kingston – are designed to focus attention on the apse, where the *cathedra* now is. The high altar, sometimes with ornate statuary or reredos, was in the apse. Though not all cathedrals were designed to have the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the high altar, many of them did. The *cathedra* was on the side – as today can be seen in

the cathedrals of Ottawa or New York. The *cathedra* was prominent and visible, but not the focus.

With the *cathedra* now in the central place, the entire architectural focus of the cathedral is on the bishop's seat, including at the vast majority of Masses when he is not present.

On the occasions when the bishop is present, the dominant place of the *cathedra* serves to highlight the bishop as the centre of unity and chief teacher.

When the bishop is not present the *cathedra* ought to remind congregants to pray for the bishop. Practically though, cathedrals with a central apse *cathedra* present to the people an empty chair as the dominant visual impression most of the time.

I think there is something a bit odd about that. I have celebrated Mass in our cathedral for my entire priesthood, and I still find it a bit strange, in a magnificent cathedral, to process toward the large green *cathedra* at the back of the sanctuary. But the congregation might find it more strange still, as the great empty *cathedra* is central for the entire Mass.

The late Archbishop Francis J. Spence, who ordained me, himself was uneasy about the dominant place the *cathedra* occupies in our cathedral. I think he felt a bit self-conscious having – if I might adapt Luke 4 – all the eyes in cathedral fixed upon him, rather than Jesus. In any case, he sometimes did not use the *cathedra* when he celebrated Mass in the cathedral.

In my own parish church of Sacred Heart of Mary, the rather grand chair for the priest had been placed in the central apse, in place of the old high altar. And some of my predecessors did not like sitting in it either, thinking that the focus ought not to be on them. So they left it empty and sat elsewhere.

I did not like sitting there either, and so in the first year we moved the Blessed Sacrament back to the central apse, and the priest's chair to the side. I was a new pastor, but had the support of the parishioners and the benefit of good advice.

The papal nuncio at the time had visited a few weeks after I began as pastor, took one look at our church and advised that I remove the chair from the central apse and put the tabernacle back. So I did, and he came back the next year to celebrate Mass.

Our reconfiguration took less than an afternoon; we also brought back into the sanctuary the ornate original pulpit. A cathedral reconfiguration would be a more involved project, of course, but worthy of consideration.

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