



**Statement of the Most Rev. Robert J. Cunningham
April 21, 2009**

The first gift that our Lord gave to his disciples following His Resurrection was the gift of peace. As I greet each of you here and all in the Diocese of Syracuse for the first time, I pray that you will experience the joy of that same gift and be strengthened in your faith.

Trusting in God's providence and relying on His grace I happily accept the appointment of our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to serve as the Bishop of Syracuse. I pledge to him this morning and every day my fraternal affection and loving obedience.

I come to you primarily as a pastor -- -- a shepherd of souls -- -- to proclaim the good news of the Gospel, to teach as Jesus did. I invite each of you to join me in the daily challenge of developing a deeper relationship with God as a disciple of our Risen Lord.

I am especially grateful to Bishop James M. Moynihan whose gracious welcome is most appreciated. For the past five years we have worked together here in New York State and in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. I pray that God will continue to give us many opportunities to pray and to work together for the faith here in Central New York. It has been a privilege for me to have met the last four bishops of Syracuse: Bishop David Cunningham, Bishop Frank Harrison, Bishop Joseph O'Keefe, and Bishop James Moynihan. I have heard from them of your deep faith and your love for the church. I hope to build on the pastoral dedication of Bishop Moynihan and Bishop Thomas J. Costello. I pledge my best efforts to serve the people of this diocese. You have my love and my devotion.

Sent by Pope Benedict XVI, I come to teach and preach the Word of God; to love you with wholehearted affection and to serve your needs especially as a minister of the Eucharist and reconciliation. I hope to be a source of unity for the diocese.

I salute my brother priests who are my principal and irreplaceable collaborators in preaching the eternal newness of the Gospel. I look forward to coming to know you individually as father, brother and friend. Your calling is a noble vocation! The parish priest has the unparalleled joy of being with people at all the important moments of their lives. I look forward to our working together with one mind and one heart as we serve our people. I pray that God will keep you strong for the task. I pray also that the example of your lives lived out prayerfully will inspire other young men to follow in your footsteps and to hear the Master's call: "Come, follow Me."

To the permanent deacons who exercise a ministry of charity and service in our midst; to the women and men in consecrated life who embody God's love, I thank you for ministering in countless ways large and small. The Church of Syracuse is in your debt. To our seminarians who are discerning the call to priesthood: be strong and continue to place your hope in the living God. To our pastoral ministers, to our faithful parishioners active in so many ways, thank you for all that you do. I look forward to working with the diocesan staff as we serve the people of this local Church. To those who for whatever reason have drifted from an active faith life in the church, please come home. We need you. Your presence will enrich the life of the church.

I greet our brothers and sisters in other faith communities and churches throughout the seven counties of Central New York. I pray that we will work together on issues of common concern and that together we will witness to the dignity of the human person and to the value of every human life from the first moment of conception until the moment of natural death.

This year the Catholic Church is celebrating a special year in honor of Saint Paul - the Church's great communicator. I am grateful this morning for the members of the communications media here present. You help us tell the story of the Church. We could not do it without you. Thank you for your thoughtful and careful transmittal of the truth which you convey to our community. We rely upon your goodness.

Finally this morning my thoughts turn with affection and admiration to the priests and people of the Diocese of Ogdensburg. Five years ago

you welcomed me as a stranger in your midst. From the first day I felt at home. I have enjoyed the support of your prayers and the many ways that you helped me to be your Bishop. It has been a wonderful grace for me to serve you. I will carry you in my heart, pray for you daily and rejoice in our happy memories. "I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you."(Philippians 1:3-4)

I pray now that Mary, Mother of the Church, who under her title of the Immaculate Conception is patroness of the Diocese of Syracuse, will accompany us in the days and years ahead. May God bless us all and give success to the work of our hands.