

# A New Shepherd for Seattle

On December 1, 2010, Archbishop-Elect J. Peter Sartain will be installed as the Ninth Bishop, Fifth Archbishop of Seattle. All are welcome to attend the installation liturgies, Tuesday, November 30 at 7:00pm, and Wednesday, December 1 at 2:00pm. *This is the fourth in a series of inserts exploring the history of the bishops who have ministered here for the past 160 years.*

## A WISE MAN FROM THE EAST

When Bishop Edward O’Dea died on Christmas Day, 1932, he had led the Church in Seattle for 37 years. He wasn’t just *a* bishop; he was *the* bishop. The rain and clouds of a Northwest winter that marked his funeral day seemed to portend a gloomy future.

It would be several months before a successor to Bishop O’Dea was named. During this period—called the *sede vacante*, or “empty chair”—one-time Cathedral pastor Msgr. William Noonan served as administrator of the diocese. As always, speculation was rife about who O’Dea’s successor might be. Seattle priests had their hopes set on Bishop John O’Shea, a Maryknoll missionary serving in China. Few Seattleites had even heard of Father Gerald Shaughnessy, SM.

Shaughnessy was a thoroughly east coast man, born in Massachusetts in 1887. He attended public schools and then graduated from Boston College, later entering the Marists (he proudly retained his religious initials, “S. M.,” even after he became a bishop). He was ordained at the then rather late age of 33, and in 1925 completed his doctorate. (His dissertation, which studied the retention of the Catholic faith among immigrant populations in the U.S., was later published under the title, *Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith?*) He also worked in the office of the Apostolic Delegate (the Pope’s representative in the United States), and taught courses at Catholic University. Shaughnessy was happy in his work as a bureaucrat and academic, and looked forward to a long career in the capital.

But that was not to be. On July 3, 1933, he received word that Pope Pius XI had named him Bishop of Seattle. His first reaction was alarm. “You will forgive me for writing in English, [rather than Latin],” he said in a letter to the Father General of his order. “As it is I can hardly think even in that language when I contemplate my appointment to Seattle.” He had never been to Seattle—the closest he had come was a visit to California and a short stint as a teacher in Anaconda, Montana. To leave his beloved Marist community and take up residence and leadership among total strangers was a frightening prospect. And yet there was hope as well. “I have to



Above: a formal portrait captures the keen gaze of Gerald Shaughnessy, the fourth bishop of Seattle.

Below: “What’s the furthest place youse got? Seattle!” Shaughnessy treasured this clipping from the comic strip, “Joe Palooka.”

believe that God has led the Holy Father to choose me for this work; and I cannot doubt that God will give me the necessary grace if I but try at least in some small measure to deserve it.” As a faithful servant to the Church, Shaughnessy accepted the new assignment. It is no accident that he chose for his episcopal motto the single word, *Fiat*, for he had struggled to echo Mary’s “yes” to God.

Shaughnessy was consecrated a bishop in the crypt of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. on September 19, 1933, and then headed west for his solemn installation on October 10, 1933—he would be the first of our bishops to be installed at St. James Cathedral. Msgr. Noonan, with Msgr. Stafford, the Cathedral’s pastor, planned a series of events which would demonstrate to the new bishop that though far away, Seattle was very far from provincial. Everything was planned with care, from the music for the Mass (the incomparable Cathedral choir of men and boys), to the menu for the banquet (which started with “Pamplemousse Supreme” and ended with “Glace Jubilaire”). There were delegations to greet him at train stations all across the state. Upon his arrival at King Street Station, he was taken directly to the Cathedral, which

was packed with children from across the diocese, who joyfully welcomed him and received his first blessing.

Throughout the events, joyful as they were, Bishop O’Dea cast a long shadow. He was impossible to replace, and difficult to follow. “His holy life, his intelligent, incessant devotion to duty are fresh in the memory of all,” said Msgr. Noonan at the opening reception for the new bishop. “Among the brightest pages in the history of the Catholic Church in America, must ever be those in which glitters the name of Edward John O’Dea!”

Bishop Shaughnessy had big shoes to fill, and many daunting challenges ahead of him. His meticulous administration and careful leadership would carry the Diocese of Seattle through the years of depression and war.

Corinna Laughlin