



Cardinal Robert W. McElroy of San Diego speaks with young members of the parish of St. Frumentius, his titular church in Rome, before formally taking possession of the church and celebrating Mass there April 23. (CNS/Chris Warde-Jones)



by Christopher White

Vatican Correspondent

[View Author Profile](#)

cwhite@ncronline.org

Follow on Twitter at [@cwwhiteNCR](https://twitter.com/cwwhiteNCR)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

Rome — April 24, 2023

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

San Diego Cardinal Robert McElroy dubbed himself a "new parishioner" of Rome's St. Frumentius ai Prati Fiscali during his first Mass April 23 at his titular church, a longstanding tradition meant to symbolize the unity of the pope with his cardinals around the world.

"While many of the churches entrusted to cardinals have great histories but less pastoral vitality in the present day, I knew that San Frumenzio is a vibrant community of faith in which men and women and families come together to celebrate the Eucharist in the same sacrifice and meal through which the disciples in today's Gospel encounter the risen Christ," said the California cardinal.

McElroy was [elevated to the](#) College of Cardinals on Aug. 27 last year, becoming the fifth U.S. cardinal named by Pope Francis and the first ever from San Diego.

The cardinal drew a parallel between the young and vibrant parish of St. Frumentius in a residential neighborhood in northern Rome to his home diocese back in San Diego, which is made up of many diverse families and where more than [half](#) of the population is under the age of 40.

During his five-minute homily, delivered in both Italian and English, he told the congregation how he visited the birthplace of the parish's namesake, St. Frumentius, during a trip with three other U.S. bishops to show solidarity with the church in Lebanon last month.

The fourth-century saint was born in Tyre, before traveling as a missionary to Africa, where he was eventually made a bishop and established the church in Ethiopia.

Advertisement

McElroy said that he prayed his new titular parish would embody the "faith, missionary zeal, the care for the poor, the marginalized and the unswerving hope

that Frumentius exemplified in his life and service."

Earlier in the morning, McElroy also greeted children at a family Mass, where, through an interpreter, he told the young people that he was saddened not to be able to speak directly to them in Italian.

The cardinal said he had studied in Rome 38 years ago and joked: "Don't ever forget your Italian."

He said it was a joy to see "children and young people and your families coming closer to God."

"God always wants to come closer to you," he told them, before asking the children how they spent their Easter holidays and giving them high fives and a blessing.

According to the longstanding tradition, every new cardinal is assigned a church in the Diocese of Rome and is its honorary pastor until death, though the cardinal is not involved in the church's governance. McElroy, 69, is only the second cardinal to be named the titular cardinal of St. Frumentius, which was designated a titular church by Pope John Paul II in 1988.

The parish, which completed construction in the 1980s, welcomed the new cardinal during a standing-room-only Mass with more than 300 attendees, including U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican [Joseph Donnelly](#), and a lively liturgy with bongos and guitars.

During his homily, reflecting on the Gospel story of Emmaus, where two disciples encounter Christ after his resurrection and at first fail to recognize him, McElroy began his remarks by saying, "I come to you as a stranger, but on a deeper level, a brother through one faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ."

He noted that he hopes his relationship with the parish will be an "ongoing relationship of encounter of grace," and in his conclusion, noted that he was a "stranger no more," but instead was at home.

A version of this story appeared in the **May 12-25, 2023** print issue under the headline: Cardinal McElroy welcomed as a 'new parishioner' in his Roman church.