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Bishop Martin D. Holley's coat of arms and motto

Bishop Holley's coat of arms includes references to Pensacola

By A.W.C. Phelps , Cleveland, Ohio

Following is the explanation of the arms of the Most Rev. Martin D. Holley, D.D., Titular Bishop of Rusubisir and Auxiliary to the Archbishop of Washington:



Blazon (heraldic description): Quarterly gules (red) and azure (blue), a plow argent (silver), on a chief wavy or (gold), a fleur-de-lis azure.

Motto: His Mercy Endures (Psalm 107:1)

Explanation: The arms of Bishop Holley consist of a quartered shield (red and blue,) charged with a plow (silver, white.) The chief or upper portion of the shield is tinctured gold (yellow), the base wavy. The chief is charged with a blue *fleur-de-lis*.

The colors red and blue have long been associated in the west and in heraldry with Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin.

The silver (white) plow recalls the admonishment of Our Lord to those who put their hand to the plow (Luke 9:62) and especially in the matter of priestly vocation. The plow centered in the quarter shield emphasizes the priestly life focused on the cross.

A further significance of the plow is in its commemorating Bishop Holley's forebears on the maternal side of the family who were sharecroppers; among their crops, they raised cotton, hence the silver (white) tincture of the plow.

The cross formed by the quarterings of the surface of the shield together with the gold (yellow) chief honor Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, archbishop of Washington, with whom Bishop Holley will serve as an auxiliary bishop.

Pope John Paul II has arms bearing a gold (yellow) cross on a blue field, while Cardinal McCarrick has a red cross on a gold (yellow) field.

The wavy demarcation line below the gold (yellow) chief recalls Pensacola on the Gulf of Mexico, city of Bishop Holley's priestly life and family home.

The blue fleur-de-lis on the gold (yellow) chief honors Our Lady in a special manner. The bishop's mother Mary Elizabeth, prior to her death, mentioned that when she got to heaven, she would shine as bright as the sun. When her mortal remains were being removed from the family home, a shaft of yellow (golden) light shone through the front door and an eagle circled overhead. One of Mary Elizabeth Holley's favorite hymns was "On Eagles' Wings" by Michael Joncas.

Below the shield is displayed the motto, "His Mercy Endures," from Psalm 107:1. The motto is a brief statement and here proclaims a message of hope.

Behind the arms is placed a gold (yellow) processional cross and ensigning the whole achievement is a pontifical hat with its six tassels on each side, disposed in three rows, all green.

These are the heraldic insignia of the rank of a bishop in accordance with the Instruction of the Holy See, dated March 31, 1969. Before 1970, the pontifical hat was worn at solemn cavalcades held in conjunction with papal ceremonies. The color of the hat and the number of the tassels were signs of the rank of the prelate, a custom still preserved in ecclesiastical heraldry.

Phelps, a heraldist from Cleveland, Ohio, designed the coat-of-arms for Bishop Holley. [Back to Top](#)

Bishop Holley's motto has roots in Divine Mercy Sunday

By Peggy DeKeyser, Pensacola

On Saturday evening, April 17, 2004, Divine Mercy Sunday, then-Father Martin Holley was preparing the gifts at the altar during the 5 p.m. Mass at Little Flower Catholic Church in Pensacola. Suddenly, a brilliant shaft of light shone through the stained glass clerestory window above the door on the west side of the church. Momentarily blinded by the light, he recited the Eucharistic Prayer from memory.

After Communion at the same Mass, Father Holley turned to return to the altar, and saw the Divine Mercy picture, displayed beside the presider's chair, gleaming and sparkling with light. Again at the end of Mass, as he turned to reverence the altar, he noticed that the picture seemed to come alive with dancing beams of light.

As he and Deacon Steve Wulf reached the back of the church, they both turned to look back at the altar. The picture was still shining brightly, despite the passage of time and shifting of the setting sun.

Deacon Wulf turned to Father Holley and asked if they were both seeing the same phenomenon. "I was so happy to know that someone else had noticed, that I wasn't dreaming it," Bishop-designate Holley commented shortly before his ordination as auxiliary bishop of Washington. As they left church, several parishioners also mentioned the unusual play of light upon the picture.

In the crush of leading an active parish with a school in the Easter season, then-Father Holley quickly put the incident out of his mind — until May 18, that is.

On that day, Father Holley was named an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington, and needed to quickly decide upon his episcopal motto.

As the new bishop-designate prayed over the decision, several mottoes that had been suggested to him came to mind, but none seemed a good fit. Then one evening shortly after the announcement, as he was getting ready for bed, a song lyric lodged in his mind, "God's Mercy Endures Forever." Unable to shake the music running through his brain, he got up and found a hymnal to begin a search for the song. He couldn't find the music that went with the melody playing through his head. He finally decided that between the events of Divine Mercy Sunday, and the song experience, that God had chosen his motto for him, and was just getting around to letting him in on the secret.

The next day, Bishop-designate Holley was talking with Auxiliary Bishop Kevin Farrell of Washington. Bishop Farrell agreed with Bishop Holley that the latter's motto seemed heaven-sent, and suggested looking into Psalms 51 and 107 for confirmation.

Later the same day, A.W.C. Phelps, the heraldist who designed Bishop Holley's coat of arms, suggested to Bishop Holley that he read Psalm 107 to see if it conveyed the desired meaning.

"My motto, 'His Mercy Endures,' springs not only from that experience on Divine Mercy Sunday, but from my total experience of the mercy of our Lord. His mercy is present in the sacraments, in the liturgy, in each of our lives, continuously," Bishop-designate Holley said. "The Holy Father has said that we are living in the age of Divine Mercy. God's mercy is being poured out upon the world. And we are each called to be an instrument of his

mercy to others, a vessel."

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