

HERALDIC ACHIEVEMENT

MOST REVEREND STEVEN JOHN RAICA, J.C.D.
FIFTH BISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM



GP
III MMXX

When a bishop is ordained, the Church asks them to declare a motto and design a coat of arms. The purpose of the motto is to reflect the bishop's beliefs and convictions within the Christian faith. The coat of arms utilizes symbols to identify the bishop.

When a bishop is appointed to lead a diocese, the coat of arms is composed of several key elements. The primary element is the shield with its charges. From the viewpoint of the one behind the armor, the sides or impalements of the shield are labeled dexter (right) and sinister (left). The next element of the coat of arms is the bishop's motto, which is traditionally written in Latin on a scroll below the shield. The last key element is the ornamentation above the shield.

Bishop Raica's coat of arms, as the fifth Bishop of Birmingham, now has the Diocese of Birmingham's arms in the dexter impalement. As is custom, the diocese's arms include elements from the city after which Birmingham was named: Birmingham, England. The five blue lozenges and the cross of St. Chad from the metropolitan cathedral of the Archdiocese of Birmingham, England were incorporated into the arms as was the upright sword, a symbol of St. Paul, patron of the Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama.

The sinister impalement displays Bishop Raica's personal arms. At the top or chief of the shield, the sun is displayed. The sun was chosen to honor the bishop's paternal heritage, for the sun appears on the crest of the place in Poland where his father's family hails, Busko-Zdrój (Skotniki Duże). Below the sun, a crown is displayed. The crown, a symbol of martyrdom, represent the martyrdom of St. Stephen, the first name of Bishop Raica. The crown is colored red, the color of love and of blood shed by the martyrs for love of God. Under the crown, a pine tree is seen. The pine tree is taken from the coat of arms of Locana, a town in Northern Italy, which was home to the bishop's maternal family. The background color of gold, the first among the noble metals, symbolizes the first Virtue: Faith. In using the color, Bishop Raica points to his Catholic faith as the source of the needed strength to support his pastoral ministry.

As noted, the bishop's motto, *Sursum Corda*, is written in Latin on a scroll. The *Sursum Corda* ("Lift up your hearts" or literally, "Lifted hearts") is the opening dialogue to the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer. The dialogue dates to the earliest liturgies of the Christian Church. St. Cyprian saw the *Sursum Corda* as the expression of the mood in which the Christian should always properly begin every prayer. For St. Augustine, these words are the expression of the true Christian attitude, much the same as St. Paul's admonition to those who have risen with Christ. Since our head is in heaven, so too then must our hearts be. It is through God's grace that we are with Him, and the consciousness of this, as expressed in the common response of the faithful, is precisely what urges the priest (or bishop) on in his own prayer.

The ornamentation above the shield includes an episcopal cross under a galero with tassels extending downward. The episcopal cross is indicative of the office a bishop holds within the Church. This element is essential in identifying this particular coat of arms belonging to a bishop. The broad-brimmed hat above the pectoral cross is known as a galero. It was originally worn by the cardinals of the Church when riding horseback to shield them from the sun, but has since been adapted in heraldry as a more fitting armorial symbol for the Church. The twelve tassels coming from the galero indicate the bishop's rank with the Church as a successor to the twelve Apostles, and the green color is borrowed from a former time when bishops wore green, as opposed to the purple they traditionally wear today.