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Pensacola-Tallahassee Edition

Cathedral of the Sacred Heart celebrates 100th anniversary

By Aaron Ritz, Pensacola



TFC PHOTO BY PEGGY DEKEYSER

Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the parish, Msgr. Michael Reed, rector of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, encourages the assembly to sing with him during his homily as he challenged them to "establish a kingdom built

Some churches spend a year celebrating their 100th anniversary. Msgr. Michael Reed, rector of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Pensacola, plans to spend the next three years commemorating the parish's founding.

In 1905, 25 families organized as parishioners of Sacred Heart with the permission of Bishop Edward P. Allen of the then-Diocese of Mobile. By 1906, they began construction of the first church, but it was destroyed by a severe hurricane before its completion. Finally, in 1907, the first permanent structure, which still stands at the corner of Ninth Avenue and Jackson Street in Pensacola, opened as the first Church of the Sacred Heart.

Hundreds of parishioners and well-wishers gathered at the 11 a.m. Mass June 12 to mark the anniversary. More than 200 people stayed for the covered dish dinner after Mass.

Jim Alfred, who was baptized in the parish in 1933, decided to attend the special

on love."

event. Even though he normally attends an earlier Mass on Sunday, the lifelong parishioner came to celebrate. "I just feel like it is my parish," he said. The parish has installed wireless microphones so that Alfred, a regular lector at Mass who uses a wheelchair and cannot read from the ambo, may participate more fully in the Mass.

Jessica Emerson also attended the Mass. She married her husband, Lee, at the cathedral two years ago before moving to Metairie, La. She came to Pensacola to celebrate a younger sibling's wedding, but had the surprise of attending her former parish's celebration.

"I wanted to come to Mass here," grinned Emerson. She laughed as she admitted that her reason for coming to the Mass was as simple as proximity to her sister's wedding, but she commented on the nice surprise of the anniversary celebration.

Msgr. Reed, who celebrated the Mass with newly ordained Deacon Paul Graaff assisting, delivered a homily in which he illuminated the history of the parish while explaining how the love of God called the parish and its good works into being.

Before Sacred Heart became a parish, the Pensacola and Warrington areas had three parishes: St. Michael (1781), St. John the Evangelist (1851) and St. Joseph (1891). Msgr. Reed explained that Pensacola needed more places where Catholics could offer hope and love to their community.

"The Catholic Church was changing people's lives," said Msgr. Reed. He pointed out how St. Joseph parishioner Lillie Mae James, mother of four-star Gen. Daniel "Chappie" James, began a school near today's St. Anthony of Padua Parish. Her school focused on teaching black children in her neighborhood who otherwise may not have received quality educations. Msgr. Reed credited her faith and the education she received at St. Joseph as she grew up as the driving force behind her good works.

Msgr. Reed also explained some of the history behind the devotion to the Sacred Heart. "Particularly when the church was persecuted, the early Christians reflected on God's love," he said. When the Roman government tortured Christian families in the Coliseum, thousands of spectators who witnessed the faith and love of the early Christians converted to the church. Early Christians depicted the love of God through images of the Sacred Heart.

In the 11th and 12th centuries, a specific devotion to the Sacred Heart developed. St. Gertrude, who experienced a vision of St. John the Evangelist, heard him tell her that the world was created by God in love. He said that God wanted to rekindle that love in people's hearts through their reflecting on the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Msgr. Reed sees that love being vital to the parishioners of Sacred Heart and the city of Pensacola.

"What the world needs is more people like you and me who are committed to love," Msgr. Reed said. To illustrate his point, he began to sing a popular tune by Hal David and Burt Bacharach: "What the world needs now is love, sweet love; no, not just for some, but for everyone." Msgr. Reed invited the congregation to join

him in song and they sang together multiple times.

To continue the work of the Sacred Heart in the Pensacola community and the world, Msgr. Reed proclaimed, "The answer and the help for us is love. Establish a kingdom built on love."

Jennifer Harrington, associate director of the diocesan Department of Christian Formation, and her younger brother and sister, Stash and Katie Mihalcik, brought the gifts of bread and wine to the altar. Harrington's siblings traveled from Christ Our Redeemer Parish in Niceville to attend a dedication after the Mass which commemorated her husband's service to the parish as youth director from 1996-2004. Donald Harrington died from colon cancer last June.

Before the recessional hymn, Msgr. Reed led the congregation in a devotion to the Sacred Heart, a series of prayers that he invited the faithful to pray frequently during the next three years of celebration.

After the meal in the parish hall, Msgr. Reed blessed a new crucifix that will hang on the north wall in the large hall. He also blessed an image of the Sacred Heart that will hang in the parish offices. Parishioners read excerpts from the history of the parish after the meal and spent time learning or remembering the many good works of the parish.

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