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Pensacola-Tallahassee Edition

St. Michael rededicated after hurricane-damage repair

By Aaron Ritz, Pensacola

Following the most recent repairs to the church due to hurricane damage, Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ, rededicated St. Michael Church Feb. 19.

St. Michael is the oldest parish in the diocese, founded in 1781 by a Capuchin priest, Father Cyril de Barcelona. According to parish records, after beginning in a former warehouse and suffering building losses from collapse and fire, the current church was dedicated June 6, 1886, by then-bishop of Mobile, Ala., Bishop Jeremiah O'Sullivan.

One hundred years later, after an extensive renovation, the church experienced another rededication with Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb of Mobile delivering the homily.

Hurricanes have not spared St. Michael Church, located only a few blocks from Pensacola Bay. This rededication came about as the result of renovations from Hurricane Ivan damage.

In his homily, Bishop Ricard commented on the good fortune of the parish church compared to the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina, which demolished churches in Louisiana and Mississippi.

More than 70 people attended the 11a.m. Mass at St. Michael. Father Peter McLaughlin, Father Tom Murphy and Father Jerry McMann concelebrated with the bishop.

Before the Mass began, Bishop Ricard blessed the holy water and led a procession around the church, sprinkling both the people and the building.

Referring to the Gospel reading from Mark, the bishop reminded everyone that in God there are no coincidences, mentioning that Jesus healed the paralytic man spiritually before he healed him physically.

"Jesus healed the total person," he said, "Jesus came to heal the world ... a world that needed healing. Much of human misery comes from the human heart. Much of what we hear is really man-made agony."

Recalling the words of St. John Chrysostom at the dedication of the Hagia Sophia, Bishop Ricard said, "As we rededicate this church today, we remind ourselves that we are the church of God. Let this church stand as long as our faith, our love, our outreach and our compassion support it."

After Mass, parishioners and guests were invited to tour the ground floor of the recently renovated rectory and to visit with each other while enjoying refreshments in the parish hall across the street.

"I love the colors," Dorothy Powell said. She added that she may use them as a guide in repainting her home, which is being reconstructed due to Hurricane Ivan.

Parishioner Pat Duncan, who was baptized at St. Michael 84 years ago, said that he wants to see the parish grow because of the renovation. "I hope we get more people."

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