

# 225th Anniversary - Archdiocese of Baltimore

## **Introduction: Looking Back and Looking Ahead**

When I announced that this celebration would take place on All Souls' Day, a priest took me aside and said, "Archbishop, All Souls' doesn't seem like a very good day for a celebration. Don't you think it's kind of somber?" "You may have a point," I responded, "It's not a day to break out the campaign!"

But the more I think about it, the more appropriate it seems to celebrate our 225th Anniversary on All Soul's Day. For one thing, this year it falls on the Sunday closest to the actual day on which the Diocese of Baltimore was established, November 6th, 1789. More importantly, All Souls' Day is preeminently a day of hope: It's a day for us to remember gratefully those who have gone before us and to pray for them, even as we embrace "a hope that is full of immortality". In fact, in his 1792 Pastoral Letter, our first Bishop, John Carroll, urged fellow Catholics in his new diocese to pray for the dead. "Follow your departed brothers and sisters into the regions of eternity," he said, "with your prayers, and all the assistance which is suggested by the principles of faith and piety". Let us remember, give thanks, and pray, so that in hope we may become who we are.

## **Putting Foundations in Place**

In 1789, when Father John Carroll was appointed the 1st Bishop of Baltimore, he was entrusted with a vast diocese that stretched North to Canada, West to the Mississippi River, and South to Florida and Louisiana. The proceedings of the First Synod of Baltimore and his Pastoral Letter remind us that Bishop John Carroll had to build the Church in America from the ground up. In 1789 there were about 25,000 Catholics, only a few priests, and a few churches, and most of these churches were in disrepair with little financial support in sight. Further, he accepted the challenge of helping the Catholic Church make its way in a new republic that was itself an experiment in democracy and freedom; even so, Catholics would face an uphill climb in becoming part of this new society.

The cousin of the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence, John

Carroll hailed from a most prominent Maryland family. One historian described him as “an innate organizer” and “a gritty pragmatist”. yet in the face of many obstacles, he put his gifts at the service of the Gospel. By the time of his death, Archbishop Carroll’s Cathedral was rising from the ground, our beloved Basilica whose architecture reflects the spirit of this nation; St. Mary’s Seminary, our nation’s first seminary, was growing; Mt. St. Mary’s College & its seminary, our nation’s second, was also growing. The dioceses of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Bardstown had been established and Baltimore had been raised to the dignity of a Metropolitan See. Twenty-five thousand Catholics had grown to 160,000. The foundations for the Church in America had been carefully set in place. To borrow a phrase, Archbishop John Carroll “built better than he knew”.

### **Archiepiscopal Snapshots**

There followed a succession of Archbishops. On the day I was installed, Cardinal O’Brien placed on me the pectoral cross of John Carroll which I am wearing today. It is a sign of continuity & solidarity with those archbishops who have gone before me, to name but a few:

Archbishop Ambrose Marechal who completed the Basilica Cathedral; Archbishop Samuel Eccleston who presided over many of the Provincial Councils of Baltimore that helped to shape the Church in the United States; Archbishop Martin Spalding, larger than life and beloved by all, who led the Archdiocese in the painful days just after the Civil War; The great James Cardinal Gibbons who led the Church of Baltimore for 44 years and whose leadership helped shape the 20th century Church in the United States. We remember Archbishop Michael Curley’s love for the poor and Archbishop Francis Keough who oversaw the construction of this magnificent Cathedral of Mary Our Queen; Cardinal Lawrence Shehan who championed civil rights and led the way in implementing the II Vatican Council, together with Archbishop William Borders whom so many of us had the privilege of knowing, loving, and working with. Standing with the two great Archbishops Emeriti of Baltimore, Cardinal William Keeler and Cardinal Edwin O’Brien, I give thanks to God for these Archbishops, our predecessors, who were men of vision and energy, preachers of the Gospel, apologists for the faith. They built seminaries and filled them, encouraged priestly and religious vocations and oversaw the building of parishes, schools, healthcare & charitable institutions. Like us, they were fallible

human beings with strengths and weaknesses, with dreams realized and unrealized – but as we pray for them today, we give thanks, for we are standing on their shoulders!

### **No Lone Rangers**

Yet no Archbishop past or present acts alone. In a moment of frustration, Archbishop John Carroll said of his priests that they were “a medley of clerical characters”. Yet it was this cast of characters that did much of the work in laying the foundations for the Church in the United States and in serving the pastoral needs of a growing immigrant nation. We, your priests, are still “a medley of clerical characters” – no doubt about it – but I’m here to tell you that the priests of this Archdiocese are good, generous men; who serve side by side with priests in consecrated life. I wonder if you’d join me in expressing our gratitude for all our priests past & present! From St. Mary’s Seminary, Roland Park & Mt. St. Mary’s Seminary, Emmitsburg nearly 200 seminarians are present in this Cathedral church this afternoon; please join me in thanking them for answering God’s call! Let’s also thank the deacons – both those preparing for the priesthood and our permanent deacons – for their devoted service to the parishes and other ministries of this Archdiocese!

And with our priests, deacons, and seminarians, we acknowledge gratefully the religious women & men who serve this local church. From your ranks have come the holy ones Baltimore proudly claims – from the Daughters of Charity, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton a true pioneer in Catholic education in the United States; from the Redemptorists, St. John Neumann and Blessed Francis Seelos, Pastors of St. Alphonsus Church in Baltimore, great missionaries, preachers of the Gospel and confessors; Servant of God Mother Mary Lange, founder of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first African-American Congregation and herself an educator and great leader, together with the Josephite Fathers and Brothers; Who could overlook the foundational role of the Society of Jesus or the pioneering work of the Christian Brothers? With us today are many women and men in consecrated life, from a variety of religious orders and institutes too numerous to mention – Without you this Archdiocese would not have gotten off the ground, especially its works of Catholic education, charity & our five Catholic hospitals, together with Notre Dame of Maryland and Loyola University, As you see here today students from our Catholic schools and representatives of Catholic healthcare, and other ministries I hope you

will feel our deep appreciation for what you have done and for what you continue to do so generously in our midst!

Yet the story of the Archdiocese of Baltimore isn't written only by priests & religious; mostly, it is written by you, the lay women and men of this Archdiocese. It is being written in the homes you have established where the faith is handed on from generation to generation; That history is being written by young people who are coming of age in the church and taking their rightful place within it. It is being written in the workplace and ballot box where you bear witness to your faith, and in the many ministries of the Church which you sustain by your leadership, expertise, participation, and generosity, Catholic schools, Catholic Charities, Catholic health care. I think of the Order of the Holy Sepulcher, the Order of Malta, and yes, with special affection today, I mention the Knights of Columbus, whose founder, the Venerable Fr. Michael J. McGivney, was ordained to the priesthood in our Cathedral Basilica by then-Archbishop Gibbons. Dear members of the laity: how deeply I thank you, how happy I am you are here today, and how much I enjoy working with you and for you day in and day out!

### **No Laurels Upon Which To Rest**

Yet in remembering and praying for those, past and present, who have built this local church and sustained it by their prayers and zeal – we, the people of this Archdiocese of Baltimore, are confronted with a challenge. From eternity those who have gone before us in faith call out to us. This is the day of their visitation, for before us, their example shines. Proved and purified by trials and sufferings of every sort, they call upon us to give ourselves entirely to the mission of spreading the Gospel and building up the Body of Christ in ways appropriate for our time. As a cloud of witnesses, those bishops, priests, religious, lay women and men, urge us to greater confidence in the most fundamental proclamation of the faith – the victory of the Incarnate Son of God, crucified and risen, over sin and death: *“Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”*

And from their place in eternity, our forebears are praying for us, urging us onward, pleading with us to open our hearts to Jesus sent as our Redeemer, and asking us to heed Pope Francis' call that we become 'missionary disciples', ready to bear witness

to Christ, ready to help accompany those who no longer practice their faith or who are searching for truth and love to the fullness of life and love, revealed by Christ & communicated by the Holy Spirit.

The intrepid faith of those who went before us prompts us on this anniversary day to rededicate ourselves and this Archdiocese to the mission of evangelization – relentlessly asking the question, what does the mission require of us, how should we be present in every neighborhood of this local church, how should we open our arms to the newly arrived and our growing diversity? What should we do to support our families as the principal agent of evangelization? What should we do to make our parish communities vibrant, our schools solid, and our charities signs of Christ's compassionate love for the vulnerable? What should we do to defend life and human dignity, to reach the young, and to respect the dying and the aged? How can we help create a society that is more just and compassionate, a society truly open to the gift of life and the promise of eternal life?

Of ourselves we are powerless but together, together, we can do all things in the One who strengthens us, Jesus our Redeemer, Jesus the Way, the Truth, and Life! Mary Star of Evangelization, Mary Our Queen: pray for us!