

John Carroll lecture reveals history of Catholicism in U.S.

As part of an ongoing celebration of the 200th anniversary of the elevation of Baltimore to archdiocesan status, Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien introduced the John Carroll Lecture series April 22 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Baltimore. The series focuses on the history and heritage of Catholicism in America.

"We need to deepen ourselves in our love and appreciation of the heritage that's been given us," said Archbishop O'Brien, adding that he hopes to see the series become an annual event.

The opening series presentation, "Right from the Start: John Carroll, Our First Bishop," was delivered by Archbishop Timothy Dolan of Milwaukee.

Archbishop Dolan spoke of the role of John Carroll - first bishop of the first diocese in America, in the growth and development of Catholicism in America.

According to Archbishop Dolan, Archbishop Carroll's passion for the Catholic Church drove his efforts to create "a structured, organized, regularized, respected, visible" church, loyal to Rome and ready to face the challenges of the developing American culture.

Archbishop Carroll's efforts in developing an organizational structure for clergy, creating and fostering Catholic educational institutions including Georgetown University and St. Mary's Seminary, and advocating for a visible Catholic presence laid the groundwork for the continued growth of Catholicism in United States.

Though deeply committed and loyal to the Bishop of Rome, Archbishop Carroll petitioned for the ability to name an official bishop to provide the canonical leadership necessary to guide the developing church through the turbulent political and social culture in America.

In 1789, the Holy See designated Baltimore, where Archbishop Carroll had been residing, as the first diocese of the United States, with John Carroll as its bishop.

Continued growth of the church in America led to the need for additional leadership, and Baltimore was designated an Archdiocese in 1808, with Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Bardstown (now Louisville, Ky.) as its suffragan sees, with Archbishop John Carroll its shepherd.

Among the greatest challenges Archbishop Carroll faced was that of remaining canonically loyal to Rome while balancing “the unique traits of American constitutionalism that codified religious freedom and the separation of church and state,” said Archbishop Dolan.

Paul Barker, principal of The John Carroll School in Bel Air and one of the nearly 400 people who attended the lecture, found Archbishop Dolan’s presentation enlightening.

“Carroll understood what it was to be a loyal Catholic, but he also understood that for the church to grow in an American culture that has democratic values sometimes causes tension with the value of loyalty to the mother church,” Mr. Barker said.

Carroll’s struggle with the relationship between religion and politics struck a cord in Jim O’Hara, who is a retired legal historian and professor from Loyola College of Maryland, Baltimore. Mr. O’Hara was impressed by Archbishop Dolan’s response to the question about the implications for the church today.

“Dolan made the comment that the church, as a church, can’t be partisan, but the church as citizen can and has the obligation to bring its moral insights into the political debate,” said Mr. O’Hara, stressing the need for the church to actively participate in the formulation of the moral side of debate surrounding the issues that people must decide.

For Marianne Faulstich of St. Louis Church in Clarksville, the presentation awakened a new world of history.

“I love history,” said Ms. Faulstich, who hopes to do some additional reading about John Carroll as well as the Charles Carroll family, which was connected to the Clarksville area. “I love being Catholic. I love Maryland, and this brings it all together.”

Sister Elizabeth Anne Allen, O.P., principal of Mount de Sales Academy, Catonsville, found the lecture an affirmation of Catholic identity, adding “I think it was perfectly timed, especially following our Holy Father’s visit and a wonderful way to start our bicentennial.”

The bicentennial celebration will continue with the next presentation in the John Carroll lecture series, titled “Popes, Power and World Politics: from Leo XIII to Benedict XVI,” on May 12. The final lecture will take place on June 9th, titled “The New Faithful.” Both lectures, which are free and open to the public, will be held at the Baltimore Basilica beginning at 7 p.m.

For more information about the John Carroll Lecture Series or additional Bicentennial Celebration Events, visit the Archdiocese of Baltimore Web site at <https://www.archbalt.org>.