

Re-interment of Bishop Chanche

To Bishop Joseph Latino I am deeply grateful for the invitation to preach on this occasion and for attending to the details associated with my coming to Natchez.

Thanks also to Mr. Michael Ruck and his staff. When Bishop Latino wrote about the possibility of bringing Bishop Chanche back here for burial, I immediately turned to Mr. Ruck for assistance, and he responded magnificently. The Holy Father, in creating new cardinals, did pose a difficulty, but Bishop Latino helped solve the problem.

Bishop John Joseph Chanche was born in Baltimore on October 4, 1795, nearly six years after the establishment of the first American diocese. His parents moved to Baltimore from what is now Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

John Chanche had reason to know the first three archbishops of Baltimore: Archbishop John Carroll enrolled him in the ranks of the clergy by giving him tonsure in 1810; Archbishop Leonard Neale, who had served for 15 years as the coadjutor to Archbishop Carroll, conferred the Minor Orders on him around 1813; and his brother Sulpician, Archbishop Ambrose Marechal, ordained him a priest on June 7, 1819.

John Chanche saw the first Cathedral of our nation rise in the Church dedicated to Our Lady's Assumption, a reminder of the 15th day in August, 1890, when John Carroll was ordained a bishop in Lulworth Castle, England. (Like this Basilica of St. Mary's, the cathedral came to be declared a basilica. This happened in 1937, under the administration of Archbishop Curley.) In the early days of the U.S., John Carroll's cousin, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence, died at Doughoregan Manor, and Father John Chanche

was at his side, to administer the Sacraments of the Church.

Like Jeremiah in the First Reading, John Joseph Chanche shrank from being put over others. He could not plead youth as an excuse, as did Jeremiah. He told his brother bishops to not recommend him as coadjutor archbishop of Baltimore and as coadjutor bishop of Boston and New York. Finally, the pressure on him was so great that he accepted the call to Natchez, one of the earliest dioceses in the United States to be made a titular see. (The present titular bishop of Natchez is the Most Rev. Salvatore Cordileoné, Auxiliary Bishop of San Diego.)

On December 15, 1840, Pope Gregory XVI named him Bishop of Natchez and in February, 1841, he received from Rome the papal bulls officially appointing him to this see. Baltimore comes in again, inasmuch as he was ordained a bishop by Archbishop Eccleston, the Sulpician-trained priest who had preceded him as President of St. Mary's College, the first seminary in our country. The archbishop was assisted by Bishop Fenwick of Boston, who earlier had urged him to accept nomination as coadjutor archbishop of Baltimore, and Bishop Hughes of New York, himself a graduate of Mt. St. Mary's Seminary, Emmitsburg.

In his ministry here in Natchez, Bishop Chanche lived out the words of the Second Reading today. He "tended the flock of God"... "overseeing it not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful profit but eagerly." Bishop Chanche took to heart the words of the Apostle: "Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock."

As Bishop Chanche struggled with the debt incurred in building this Church, he found his Calvary, his meeting with the cross of Jesus. And yet, while burdened with the Cathedral debt, he managed to found a number of churches and mission posts.

The whole Catholic Church suffered a loss in the death of Pope Gregory XVI, who

died in July, 1846, on the very day that the chalice sent by him for the Diocese of Natchez, was brought by Bishop Odin, of Texas, later Bishop of Galveston and Archbishop of New Orleans.

Bishop Chance earnestly tried to fulfill the mandate of today's Gospel passage: “