

Homily

75th Anniversary Mass

of The Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

St. Paul Cathedral, Pittsburgh

May 17, 2015

Rev. James W. Garvey

Good Afternoon. My name is Father Jim Garvey, and along with the principal celebrant today, Bishop William Winter, D.D. (retired), and the concelebrating priests, I am taking part in this Eucharistic Liturgy to mark the 75th Anniversary (May 17, 2015) of the founding of **THE CATHOLIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA**. I am pleased to see so many of you here today to join us in marking this special occasion.

In today's Gospel (John 17: 11b - 19), the Evangelist John recalls for us that Jesus came to save us from our sins. Jesus invites us to become one with Him as he is one with the Father. We are reminded that Jesus chose to send us, his followers, into the world, so that we might bring His light and His love to people who are hungering for the truth. Jesus consecrates us in truth as he sends us forth to Christianize the world in His name.

For some 2,000 years, the Christian community has engaged in missionary outreach spreading the Good News of the Gospel — spreading the truth that God is our Father, Jesus is our Savior, and the Holy Spirit accompanies us on our pilgrimage through life until we cross over the threshold of death, and are united with Christ in the truth of his Kingdom which never ends.

The truths of our faith are found in the tradition of the Church, just as they are inscribed and enshrined in the Scriptures and have been proclaimed for millennia. The "truth" of Jesus's saving Word in Scripture is a record of many of the extraordinary things he said and did during His time on this earth. Also part of that record are the Epistles of Paul, James, John, and the Acts of the Apostles. The faith community grew reflecting on the Word of God in the Scriptures, and was nourished by Jesus's saving actions in the Sacraments.

We appreciate and derive much benefit from reading about and studying the events that befell that first Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles. We recognize how important it is to chronicle the "history" of what happened in the history of the Church for the last two thousand years.

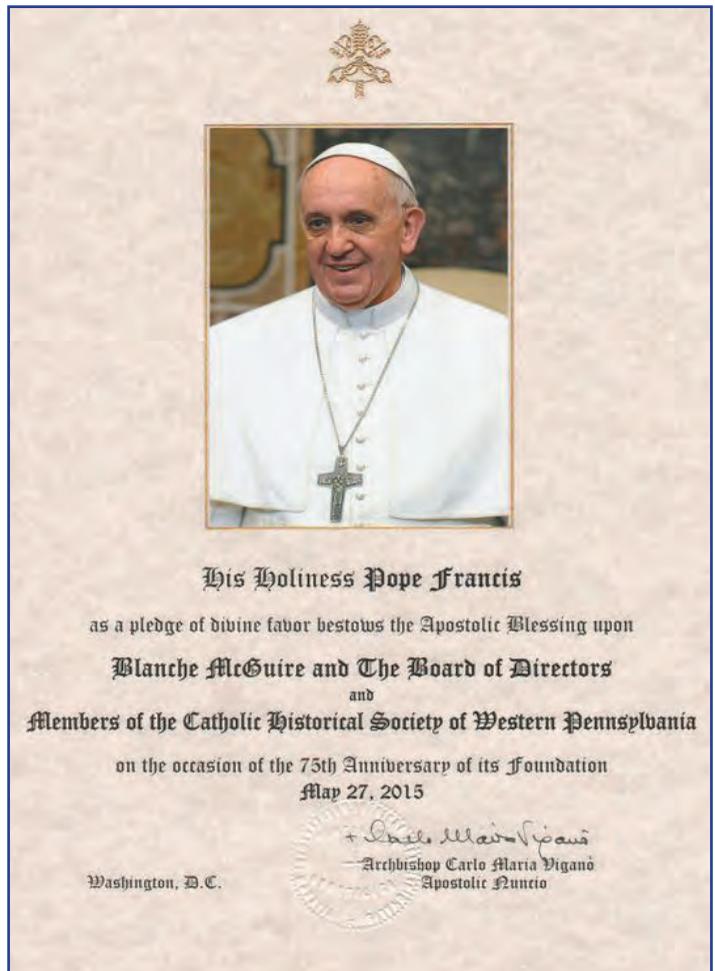
And, that is very much what the Catholic Historical Society has been about these past seventy-five years in Western Pennsylvania.

We salute those early founders of this Society who had the foresight to gather like-minded men and women — clergy, religious and lay — and make the effort to preserve the record of what was happening as the Church in Western Pennsylvania grew and developed through many waves of immigrants and converts who saw the light and found the truth in the teachings of the Church.

In the very earliest days of this nation, Western Pennsylvania was really rough and tumble. This was the frontier. There were many arguments about whether Pittsburgh was part of the Virginia Territory, or Penn's Woods, Pennsylvania.

No question about it, Pittsburgh was the jumping off point for those who were traveling west by way of the Ohio River, and the Mississippi — including the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804-1806) which was not the first, or the last to cross the interior of the United States in search of the western boundaries of this continent at the Pacific Ocean.

After the Revolutionary War was concluded and the Church began to grow in this new nation, Pittsburgh was part of the Diocese of





Blessing of Society's Memorial Plaque at Synod Hall during 75th Anniversary Celebration (May 17, 2015). L to R: Dennis Wodzinski, John Bates, Jim Hanna, Rev. James Garvey (rear), David McMunn, Bishop William Winter (rear), Kathleen Washy, Blanche McGuire, Paul Dvorchak, and attendee.

Source: Blanche McGuire

Philadelphia, which included all of Pennsylvania, and big chunks of territory in Delaware and New Jersey.

Even then Pittsburgh was growing, and on August 8, 1843 our Holy Father Pope Gregory XVI split the state of Pennsylvania into two dioceses. The eastern half continued as the Diocese of Philadelphia, under the direction of Bishop Francis Patrick Kenrick. The other half, all of Western Pennsylvania, became the Pittsburgh diocese. Bishop Michael O'Connor was appointed the first bishop of this diocese. In the decades that followed, both dioceses, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, would be divided several times, to form new dioceses, so that the Church might continue to grow, evangelizing and better serve the ever growing Catholic population. Today Philadelphia is the metropolitan see and the suffragan sees are: Allentown, Altoona-Johnstown, Erie, Greensburg, Pittsburgh and Scranton.

Individuals and families came to this new land from Europe and other nations — they came in search of religious freedom, economic opportunity, and held high hopes that they might build a better life for their families free from tyranny, oppression, grinding poverty, and widespread bigotry. Further, they sought to escape persecution and follow the tenets of their religious beliefs.

In anticipation of the celebration that would accompany the Centenary of the Diocese of Pittsburgh in 1943, the Catholic Historical Society was formed, May 27, 1940 at St. Vincent College in Latrobe. Eight persons took on leadership roles: two were from

St. Vincent's Archabbey, Latrobe, Pennsylvania. They were Fr. Felix Fellner, OSB, and Fr. Hugh Wilt, OSB. They were joined by Fr. William J. Purcell. All three priests were professors of History. Two attorneys were also involved: Joseph A. Beck, and Paul G. Sullivan. The last two founders were: Alice Thurston McGirr, of Carnegie Library, Pittsburgh, and Elizabeth Daflinger, Associate Editor of *The Pittsburgh Catholic*.

There was a rather remarkable first public meeting held July 8, 1940 at what was then known as Mount Mercy College (now Carlow University) at which Bishop Hugh C. Boyle of Pittsburgh presided. More than 500 people attended that first meeting when the by-laws were adopted, and the name of the new Society was agreed upon: "The Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania."

The Purposes of the new Historical Society were:

1. To study American Catholic History, especially in Western Pennsylvania,
2. To gather and correlate papers, documents and relics of our Catholic heritage,
3. To research and investigate local Catholic history, and
4. From time to time, to publish the results of that research and those investigations.

Meetings were held quarterly, and at each meeting lectures were presented on Western Pennsylvania Catholic history. For the first 14 years, the Society relied completely on the rich local wealth of historians, archivists and professors to serve as speakers. Historical tours were inaugurated in 1941, along with an historical essay contest in parochial schools throughout the diocese. Talks about Catholic history were given on local radio stations WWSW-AM and WJAS-AM. Weekly history columns were researched, edited and printed in *The Pittsburgh Catholic*.

The Society was responsible for causing a history of the Diocese of Pittsburgh to be written to mark the centenary in 1943 titled: *Catholic Pittsburgh's One Hundred Years 1843-1943*. This work was the modern successor to two earlier histories of the diocese that had been written by Msgr. Andrew A. Lambing.

Over all these years, the Historical Society had been quite busy researching, investigating and publishing various articles, papers and books. In 1949 the Society reached an arrangement whereby Duquesne University would provide space in its library for the Archives of the Catholic Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Coadjutor Bishop John F. Dearden formally dedicated the Society's Archives Room at Duquesne's Library on October 8, 1950.

A major contribution of the Society was a tri-partite agreement among the Society, Duquesne University officials, and *The Pittsburgh Catholic* to microfilm all copies of *The Pittsburgh Catholic* from 1844 to the present. The result of that effort is now available on the Internet with a searchable data base for the use of the curious as well as scholars in the discipline of local Catholic history.

The first Mass celebrated in Pittsburgh's Golden Triangle was offered by Father Denys Baron in April 1754, while he was Chaplain to the French troops occupying The Point at that time. To commemorate that occasion, the Historical Society observed the 200th anniversary of that first Mass at Pittsburgh's Golden Triangle, by commissioning an original oil painting to mark the occasion, and



Society's 75th Anniversary Mass at St. Paul Cathedral. L to R: Rev. Joseph Scheib, Bishop William Winter, and Rev. James Garvey.

Source: Kathleen Washy

sponsoring a public lecture by Father John LaFarge, S.J., Associate Editor of *America* magazine.

In 1959, the Society published a booklet in observance of the bicentennial of the City of Pittsburgh, which emphasized the extraordinary growth of Catholicism in Western Pennsylvania.

In the 1960's there was a period of dormancy in the Society. In 1984, two Pittsburgh priests — Father Bernard L. Hrico, working with Monsignor Francis Glenn — restarted the Historical Society, and began an Oral History Project, provided speakers on the history of Catholicism in Western Pennsylvania for parish gatherings, expanded its lecture series, resumed tours, and co-sponsored historical lectures with other organizations.

In the following years, the Society began to publish *Gathered Fragments* — and by 2009, it assumed a color glossy journal format. In 1993, the Board of Directors converted the Society into a not-for-profit organization.

Today, the Catholic Historical Society marks its 75th Anniversary. In those decades much history has been made in Western Pennsylvania. Because of the industrious work of the Society, much of that history which touches on the Catholic Community has been recorded and catalogued.

We are proud that the Society achieved so much in the past. And we are equally pleased that everywhere people of good will

were able to generate cooperation between and among schools, institutions, clergy, religious, and lay persons. All worked together to share resources and record much of the Catholic history that was made here in Western Pennsylvania.

In the future, historians may ask: “Were Catholics active and involved Christianizing the society in Western Pennsylvania over the years?” The affirmative answer will be obvious for those who want to look. Thankfully there will be well-organized Archives containing articles and letters, journals and photographs, and recordings from oral history projects for them to research so that they can discover and wonder at the accomplishments of the Catholic Community in Western Pennsylvania.

Those who have gone before us — from colonial times to the present — worked tirelessly to build parishes, churches, schools, convents, rectories, monasteries, orphanages and hospitals. These institutions were built, staffed and maintained and in large measure continue to this day to serve the needs of the people in the wider community.

For 75 years the Catholic Historical Society has labored to preserve the record of those accomplishments — may it ever stand as a monument to our forefathers who built up this community of faith in love, and in service to God and neighbor.