

CENTENNIAL GAZETTE

St. James Cathedral, Seattle

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AFTER THE SNOW

The collapse of the dome left the Cathedral open to the elements. It was impossible to cover the gaping hole in the ceiling, but the clergy of the Cathedral hastily did what they could to protect the interior. With their own hands they covered the Stations of the Cross and other art objects with tarpaulins. During those first few days, the snow—which continued to fall steadily—made it difficult to assess the full extent of the damage. But as the rubble was gradually cleared away, there was tremendous relief and gratitude to God that no one had been injured in the catastrophe. And the walls and foundations of the building were found to be intact.

While the ever-practical Sisters prepared for the future by arranging and decorating the Cathedral Hall for the coming Sunday's Masses, Bishop O'Dea, with the clergy and members of the building committee, pondered what to do next. Their beloved Cathedral, their pride and joy, was still new—only nine years old. It had been insured against fire damage, but no mention had been made in the policy of snowstorms! The cost of rebuilding was enormous—estimated at \$150,000.

That Sunday, February 6, all the Masses ("every half hour from six to eleven inclusive," the Sisters noted in their Chronicle) were said in the Cathedral Hall. The people were amazed at the resignation of Bishop O'Dea, who was already talking about rebuilding. In a letter to the Catholics of the diocese, he wrote, "while we feel greatly afflicted, still we must accept it resignedly from the hands of God, Who will, in His own good time, convert our sorrow into joy... We know your loyalty and generosity, and we feel that a more beautiful and a more substantial temple will replace the old."

Bishop O'Dea wasted no time in making the rebuilding of the Cathedral a reality. A local architect, John Graham, was engaged. Almost all the members of the original building committee reconvened to supervise the work. By the summer of 1916, this distinguished group was able to present their new design to the world. On July 23, 1916, the Times recalled that when the dome collapsed not only Catholics but "every Seattle citizen felt something akin



When the Cathedral reopened following the collapse of the dome, the interior had been dramatically altered.

to personal loss.... To those who felt the loss to the city in the mutilation of the beautiful structure, there comes now an opportunity to express their interest in a practical way by contributing to the expense of its restoration."

The new design was ambitious, to say the least. The interior was re-envisioned, with the addition of arcades across the front of the transepts and beautiful terrazzo flooring throughout. A new dome was planned, and massive masonry piers were installed at the four corners of the crossing to support its weight. "The diameter of the new dome will be seventy feet, while that of the old was forty-five. The new dome will be 160 feet high from the floor of the church, fifty feet higher than the old. The new dome will be steel, covered with

copper."

Bishop O'Dea had hoped to have the Cathedral open in time for Christmas 1916, but rebuilding took a little longer than that. The Cathedral was rededicated, to the joy and satisfaction of all concerned, on March 18, 1917. Funds were not sufficient to build the bigger, better dome that John Graham had designed (and perhaps the people had had their fill of domes, in any case). Instead, a flat roof was built over the crossing, and the ceiling was decorated with a fresco copy of Raphael's *Ascension* where the dome had been. The clear glass windows were to be replaced, between 1917 and 1920, with stained glass from the Boston firm of Charles Connick. The interior color scheme was quite different also, "a rich harmony of old gold and brown, relieved by touches of old blue."

On the day before the Cathedral reopened, Monsignor Noonan, the Cathedral's pastor, recalled Bishop O'Dea's leadership throughout those difficult months. "All marveled at Bishop O'Dea's spirit of fortitude, and it was to all a source of inspiration, but few dared to hope for an immediate realization of a better and more magnificent St. James' cathedral," he told the newspapers. "Nevertheless, that promise is about to be fulfilled. When the doors of the cathedral are reopened on Sunday, March 18, then truly will sorrow be converted into joy."

—Corinna Laughlin