

CENTENNIAL GAZETTE

St. James Cathedral, Seattle

Issue #27 FINAL ISSUE

December 22, 2007

“ST. JAMES THE MAGNIFICENT”

On December 21, 1994, the doors of the renovated Cathedral were opened to Cathedral parishioners for the first time for First Vespers of the Dedication of a Church.

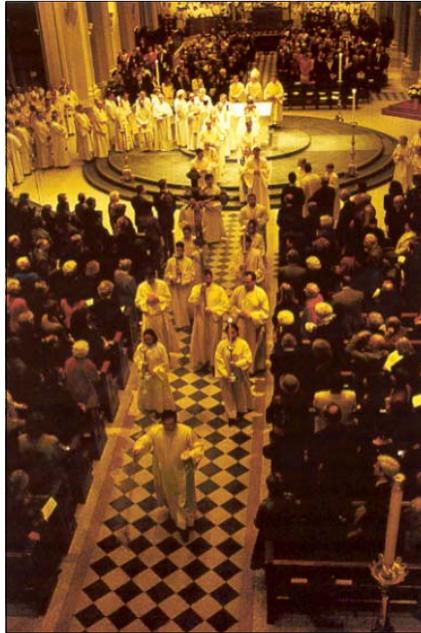
For those who were there, it was an unforgettable night. The weather was ideal—cold but perfectly clear, with a starry sky overhead. A vast crowd gathered on the west terrace of the Cathedral, spilling down the steps and on to Ninth Avenue. The joy, excitement and anticipation of those gathered was almost palpable. In keeping with the ancient rites of the Church, the architects handed over the plans and the keys of the building to the Archbishop—symbolic of the fact that this place which had been a construction site was now to be dedicated to the worship of God. And then, nine long months from that Easter Monday when the work of renovation began, the doors were opened and Archbishop Murphy and Father Ryan led the people into their new Cathedral.

Father Jim Johnson remembers how moving it was to watch the people flood inside, to see how they instinctively looked heavenward. Father Ryan also remembers the awe of the moment. “It was their St. James still, but a St. James that had realized its potential.” Many had tears in their eyes as they experienced the beauty of their Cathedral in brand-new ways. Cathedral usher Azel Shackelford summed up the feelings of many when he entered the renovated Cathedral for the first time: “I’m in Heaven!” he exclaimed.

The great entrance of the faithful continued for more than fifteen minutes, as the Cathedral Brass performed Strauss’s *Feierlicher Einzug*, and the Cathedral Choir sang motets by Bruckner and Brahms: “How lovely is thy dwelling place, Lord, God of hosts!”

Father Ryan preached the homily that night. “My heart is filled to overflowing with gratitude tonight,” he said, “gratitude to all who have helped to bring about this wonderfully happy moment, most of all, gratitude to God for letting me be part of this marvelous community of faith.” At the end of his homily, he pointed to the inscription in the oculus above the altar: *I am in your midst as one who serves*. “Around this altar we will, I hope, never stop getting the message that it is when we serve each other, especially the poorest and neediest among us, when we find ways to wash one another’s feet, then and only then will we be the church we are called to be. Then and only then, my friends, will we have truly built a great cathedral.”

The next day, at 3:00pm, Archbishop Murphy presided at the solemn Mass of Dedication. Perhaps the most memorable moment of that great liturgy was the consecration of the altar. Father Ryan stood at the altar with Archbishop Murphy as he poured the chrism from a large flagon. “He was not sparing of the oil,” Father Ryan remembers, “and it splashed and



Mass of Dedication, Thursday, Dec. 22, 1994

splattered over the altar and over us. Then he and I rubbed the oil into every inch of the surface of the altar. The scent was so powerful you could probably have smelled it a block away!” (For Dr. James Savage, that smell of chrism, which lingered in the Cathedral for weeks afterwards, was the most striking memory of the Mass of Dedication.) Father Ryan and Archbishop Murphy then took the chrism oil and traced crosses on the walls with their hands, under each of the twelve dedication candles, which were now lit for the first time.

That evening, there was an ecumenical Vespers service which was again filled to overflowing. And then there was just one day to recoup before the doors were thrown open for the Christmas liturgies!

More than two thousand people packed into the Cathedral for Midnight Mass that year, filling every seat and every available inch of standing room. As the people sat for the Liturgy of the Word, Archbishop Murphy leaned over to Father

Ryan and whispered, “This is great.” After Mass, Father Ryan asked him what he meant. The renovated space? “No,” Archbishop Murphy replied, “being among the people.” Instead of sitting in a throne-like chair in a distant sanctuary, the Archbishop now sat in the midst of the assembly, surrounded by the people he serves. The renovated Cathedral is truly a catechesis in stone, teaching us, even as it gathers us together, what being church is all about.

It was not only the parish, but the civic community that took pride in the renovated beauty of St. James Cathedral. “Gloria in Excelsis Deo!” ran one headline, and the P-I’s were even more catchy: “St. James the Magnificent.” During the months following the dedication, the renovation garnered numerous awards: architectural, liturgical, Catholic, and non-Catholic. And in the years that followed, the renovation of St. James has inspired the renovation of many churches in our own Archdiocese, and of cathedrals across the country.

The renovation was, of course, not an ending, but a beginning. The parish community has seen tremendous growth in these thirteen years, a growth Father Ryan attributes at least in part to the experience of worshiping in the renovated space. Gathered around the altar, we experience as we never had before the sense of being part of a community of faith, gathered together for a purpose, and sent forth to serve others in the name of Christ.

What will the next one hundred years hold? One thing is certain: St. James Cathedral—both the building and the people who worship here—will continue to grow and change, because cathedrals are living things. “Cathedrals,” Father Ryan has written, “are works in progress, unfinished symphonies. Like the God they are meant to image and honor, they defy easy definition and they never run out of possibilities.”

—Corinna Laughlin

This has been the final issue of the Centennial Gazette. The complete series is available online. Or, stop by the reception after the Saturday 5:30pm and Sunday 10:00am Masses today to pick up a souvenir packet of Gazettes. Thanks for reading!