

CENTENARY OF THE FOUNDATION OF SAINT PATRICK'S PARISH

Columbus, Ohio

1852 - 1952



IN THE BEAUTIFUL GREEN FIELDS of downtown Columbus, Ohio, Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati laid the cornerstone of St. Patrick's Church on Sunday, September 5, 1852. The first offspring of the mother church in the city, Holy Cross, which remained the German-speaking parish, St. Patrick's now became the center of worship for the English-speaking Catholics. These were mostly Irish immigrants who had settled around the railroad station on North High Street where there was steady employment. The Church was completed, the parish grew, and by 1855 a large bell was blessed and hung in the south tower of the Church. Its deep and mellow tone as it sounded the Angelus stirred the hearts of the devout Catholics and turned the eyes of the parishioners in pride to the two stately towers of their Church which rose like an ancient Norman castle transplanted with them into the new world.

When the rumble of guns called men to the colors in the War between the States, Father Edward M. Fitzgerald was pastor of St. Patrick's. During those difficult days he traveled to Camp Chase on the outskirts of the city where he regularly visited the sick and ministered to the dying soldiers, and became a familiar and welcome figure to the "boys in blue." Later in 1867, he was to take up his post among the people of the South as Bishop of Little Rock, Arkansas. He was consecrated in his beloved St. Patrick's Church, giving it the distinction of being the first Church in the city to have a Bishop consecrated within its walls.

The preliminary steps in the erection of Columbus as an episcopal see were taken when the Most Reverend Sylvester H. Rosecrans was transferred from his post as Auxiliary Bishop of Cincinnati to succeed Bishop Fitzgerald as pastor of St. Patrick's. A year later when the diocese was formally erected, he was named its first bishop and thus St. Patrick's became the early residence of the first Bishop of Columbus.

It was not long after this that another of St. Patrick's pas-



ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH, COLUMBUS, OHIO

tors was raised to the episcopacy when the Rev. N. A. Gallagher, who had assumed pastoral charge in 1876, was named Bishop Administrator of the Diocese of Galveston, Texas in 1881. In later years, the parish was twice honored in a similar way when two of its sons became bishops; the Most Rev. James J. Hartley, Bishop of Columbus—1904-1944, and the Most Rev. Francis V. Howard, Bishop of Covington, Kentucky—1923-1944.

In the spring of 1885, Bishop Watterson of Columbus invited the Dominican Provincial of St. Joseph's Province to have the priests of his Order take over the care of St. Patrick's Parish. The Dominicans, who had fostered the faith and established the mother church in Ohio at St. Joseph's, Somerset, in 1816, took over their new duties in the capital city on August 9, 1885, and have continued their labors for the past 67 years. A long line of Sons of St. Dominic have served the parish during this span of years and it is interesting to note that four of them were to bear the title of Very Reverend Provincial. They were Fathers Spencer, Rotchford, Heagen and Aldridge.

There was a high and violent wind on the afternoon of May 28, 1935. Repairs on the roof of St. Patrick's Church were progressing satisfactorily when suddenly a workman's blowtorch ignited the dry straw of a bird's nest resting in the spouting. It was but a matter of moments before the entire roof burst forth in smoke and flames and but a few moments more before the word had spread through the entire city that the beloved and venerable Church was on fire. As fire fighting equipment raced to the scene of the disaster the wail of another siren joined the cry as an ambulance hurried from Mount Carmel Hospital with the Rev. H. L. Martin, O.P., Pastor of St. Patrick's. Though ill at the time, he wished to be with his Church in its darkest hour. It was under Father Martin that the Church was completely rebuilt and redecorated in little more than a year.

It was in 1886 that Father Hugh J. Leonard, O.P., assistant at St. Patrick's, established the permanent post of chaplain at the Ohio State Penitentiary. Many years later on Easter Monday, April 21, 1930, Father Albert J. O'Brien, O.P., had just finished a bustling day of parish activity when he was hurriedly summoned to his post at the "Pen." The wildly leaping flames above the cold gray walls told him at a glance that the place was a raging inferno. Although in failing health, Father O'Brien heroically ministered to the sick and dying throughout the night, until he finally collapsed from sheer exhaustion. Nevertheless,

with dauntless courage he remained at the "Pen" during the tense week that followed the tragedy, doing everything he could to help and quiet the inmates.

During the agony of those awful hours he had crawled on his hands and knees down cell blocks tiered with white-hot steel bars to administer the last sacraments and give words of comfort to those of "his boys" who were helplessly trapped. When his untimely death occurred three years later, partially as a result of this unselfish devotion to duty, he was laid in state in his beloved chapel inside the walls. Many of his hard-bitten mourners wept unashamed as they viewed for the last time, the man they held in great esteem.

Inspired by Father O'Brien's heroic example, the Dominicans at St. Patrick's have continued their selfless devotion to the spiritual needs of the penitentiary. A little more than a month ago, on October 31, Father Valerian Lucier, O.P., present Chaplain, rushed to the prison and during the hours of terror and confusion he moved among the burning buildings and rioting prisoners, exerting every effort to stem the tide of devastation. He saw his chapel burn to a hollow shell with little more than the sacred vessels saved from the destroying flames. With the same determination of those who have gone before him, he is beginning again to build for the future. For such are the men who serve at St. Patrick's.

The highlight of Centennial Sunday on October 19, was a Solemn Pontifical Mass celebrated by His Excellency, the Most Reverend Michael J. Ready, D.D., Bishop of Columbus. The sermon for the occasion was preached by the Rev. J. F. Baeszler, O.P., of the Dominican Foreign Mission Bureau in New York City, only living ex-pastor of the church. After the Mass a dinner was served at the Neil House for the Bishop and visiting clergy.

That same evening a reception was held at the Neil House for friends, benefactors, and parishioners of St. Patrick's. One of the distinguished speakers for the evening was the Very Rev. James J. McLarney, O.P., Prior of St. Joseph's Priory, Somerset, Ohio.

A Solemn Mass was sung for the dead of the parish on Monday by the Rev. Paul G. Corbett, O.P., assistant pastor of the parish, and chairman of the centennial committee. The centennial celebration closed on Wednesday with a Solemn Mass for Children's Day celebrated by the Rev. Louis A. Ryan, O.P.

Dominicana extends its congratulations to the Rev. John J. Costello, O.P., and to all the priests and parishioners of St. Patrick's on this memorable anniversary. May God grant that this tradition of love and service of God by the priests and people of St. Patrick's will continue and increase in the one-hundred years that lie ahead.