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**ST. MARY'S CHURCH
PIONEER MEMBERS**

St. Mary's Church

Memorial Sermon Delivered
by Very Rev. Jas. A. Burns,
C. S. C., Ph. D., Nov. 11, '07

Pioneer Members

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THIS LITTLE BOOKLET OF TWENTY PAGES contains an Historical Review of Saint Mary's parish for the past fifty years or more. It was compiled by Very Rev. James A. Burns, C. S. C., Ph. D., a child of St. Mary's parish and now president of Holy Cross College, Washington, D. C., and was delivered by Father Burns at the Memorial Service held in St. Mary's church, during the celebration of the golden jubilee of that parish, Nov. 11, 1907.

“Let us praise men of renown, and our fathers in their generation. These were men of mercy, whose Godly deeds have not failed. Good things continue with their seed, their posterity are a holy inheritance, and their seed hath stood in the covenants. Their children for their sakes remain forever; their seed and their glory shall not be forsaken.”—Ecclus., XLIV.



THE SOLEMN SERVICE OF THE REQUIEM

Mass which we hold this morning, my dear brethren, is calculated to remind us of that most consoling truth of our holy faith, that the dead, although they may be taken from us, are not separated from us forever, nor altogether; that they continue to belong to the one true church, and, through their union, with that Church, they remain united to us; and that, just as every time the holy sacrifice of the mass is offered, the Church recalls the memory of her departed ones, so in the midst of this solemn jubilee celebration, it is fitting that our thoughts and our charity should go out more abundantly towards those of this congregation who have “gone before us with the sign of faith and rest in the sleep of peace.”

But if the first thought and purpose of this Requiem service be, as it ought to be, to remind us of what we may do by our prayers for the departed, another and not less important purpose of it is, to remind us of what those departed members, especially the early members of the parish have done for us. Looking back fifty years we can see great changes. The parish has grown, in numbers and in influence it has been multiplied over and over; but, if we look at the matter rightly, we shall see that all that the parish is in numbers, material resources, and inner spirit, and all the work that it is doing, religious, educational and social, is but the growth and development of that which was implanted and organized here in the beginning. It is the story of the mustard seed over again—the tiny seed springing up in the earth and growing greater and greater, until at length it becomes a mighty tree, under which men may find rest and in whose branches the birds build their nests. The parable, as uttered by our Blessed Lord, was doubtless a prophesy of the growth of the Church as a whole, but it is not less applicable to the elements severally which go to make up the Church, according to the law governing the growth of organic bodies, by virtue of which the characteristics of the body as a whole are reproduced in a general way in each and all of its parts.

This memorial service for the deceased benefactors and members of the congregation carries us back in thought to the time of the foundation of this city, when as yet there were only a few fishers' and traders' shanties huddled together at the foot of Hoosier Slide, with a few

farm clearings in the country lying to the east. The first historic references we have to the ministry of souls here go back to the year 1835. Chicago was then a little struggling town; Green Bay and Mackinac were the only other important white settlements on Lake Michigan; in the interior, however, all through Indiana, pioneer towns were springing up, as a consequence of the stream of immigration reaching the middle west. There were only three priests in the diocese of Vincennes, comprising all Indiana and the eastern half of Illinois. The Catholic bishops of America however, were quick to realize the possibilities of the future, and in the year 1834 Simon Gabriel Brute had been appointed bishop of Vincennes. This learned and saintly prelate, who had been driven from France many years before by the great revolution, immediately set about visiting the scattered sheep of his immense pastoral charge, and thus we find him, after a horse-back ride of hundreds of miles, reaching Chicago, and then skirting the edge of the lake until he arrived at this place, where he tells us he found, even at that early date, a few Catholic families, whom he visited and to whom he ministered. That was, as I said, early in 1835, and that is the first historic record we have to Catholic services or ministrations in Michigan City. But we may believe that even before Bishop Brute, these "few Catholic families" were visited by Father Badin, the first priest ordained in the United States, who was stationed at Fort St. Joseph, near Notre Dame, between 1830 and 1834, and, who, from that place as a centre, traveled all through Northern Indiana and Southern Michigan, minis-

tering to the scattered Catholics. It is more than likely that Father Badin stopped here again and again. We have records going to show that he must have passed through here. We may safely add the name of Father Baden, then, to that of the great Bishop Brute, and we may say that these two men were the pioneer shepherds of this flock, the men who implanted here the tiny mustard seed of faith, as they did in so many other places throughout the Middle West, the men whose names it is fitting for the people of this parish to recall first on this day, in order to hand them down in grateful remembrance to their children.

It is good to remember that there were Catholics here—both priest and bishop here—long before there were enough of Catholics to form an organized parish, that the Catholic church was here before this town had been given its present name, and even before it had any corporate existence. Bishop Brute speaks of finding “a few Catholic families.” Unfortunately, the names of these families have not come down to us. But the Catholics must have been few for many years. It was not until 1849 that the first real influx of Catholic emigrants came. The Michigan Central and the Lake Shore railroads were being built at the time, and these two great arteries of commerce and travel, attracting the stream of immigration that naturally tended to spread itself over the sea-board states, drew thousands of Catholic emigrants to the farms and little settlements of the Middle West. It was thus that, about the year 1849 we find a considerable increase in the number of Catholics here,

and during the several years following, while the railroads were being pushed on to Chicago, they continued to come. These early Catholic settlers were all either Irish or Germans. They were poor, and glad to get work of any kind, and the work that they engaged in here was of the hardest and roughest kind, out on the railroad tracks as section hands, or as day laborers and helpers in the grimy railroad shops. Neither they nor their wives had any social standing or influence in the community, although these terms did not mean quite as much in those early days as they do now; but those men and women had that which was better than riches and more ennobling than any social standing, they had the spirit of the faith, the faith of Catholic Ireland and Catholic Germany, and poor and humble as they were, those Catholic emigrants, they were carrying with them, although they little knew it, the destinies of the Church Catholic and universal into this great empire of the west.

The beginnings of organized parish life here really date from this period, although a permanent pastor was not appointed until some years later. Michigan City was fortunate in its proximity to Notre Dame, where Father Sorin and his devoted bands of brothers, priests and sisters were engaged in the development of that ancient centre of the faith. From the year 1847 on, we find in the old parish books, the names of priests who came from Notre Dame once a month or so to minister to the infant parish. Fathers Shortis, Schilling, Granger, Cointet, Rooney, Wallace, Force, Flynn, Kilroy, Meagher, Gillen and even that of Father Sorin himself, who came occa-

sionally in his capacity as superior to inspect the parish records and attest the faithfulness of his early missionary companions in the discharge of their sacred duties.

The earliest Catholic settlers were mostly Irish, and among these, as the faithful co-laborers of the band of pioneer priests just mentioned, and as deserving to be revered with them as the true founders and fathers of this parish, I might name the following, together with their devoted wives:

John Bluett,	Patrick Burns,
Thomas Clark,	Peter Donnelly,
Patrick Cassidy,	Andrew Charlton,
Timothy Fogarty,	Michael Fitzpatrick,
Patrick Hoban,	William Kenefick,
Patrick Murphy,	Patrick Olvaney,
Daniel Campbell	

We have still among us, thank God, some few who belong to this noble band, and if I do not speak their names, it is only out of regard for the character of this sacred service and place. The pioneer church of the parish dated from 1849. It was known as St. Ambrose church, and it stood on the corner of Washington and Second streets. It was a small wooden building, 20x30 feet, formerly used as a warehouse, and was replaced by a new and larger building, of wood also, erected on the same spot in 1854. The new building cost about \$1000. That seems a mere trifle now, but, as a sum to be raised, it must have appeared something immense in those days. A subscription of \$5 to the new church from men who were getting only from a dollar to a dollar and a half a

day, with newly erected or purchased homes to be paid for, and growing families to feed and clothe meant a great deal of personal sacrifice, and tradition tells us that more than one of those devoted pioneers of the faith who did not have a \$5 or even a \$1 to give, went again and again, after his hard day's work of twelve hours, and labored as long as there was light, at the work of laying the foundations, or erecting the walls, or finishing the interior of the new church building. It was the same in the case of the Germans, who built St. Mary's German Catholic church, at the corner of Washington and Fourth streets, in the year 1859. And here I might mention along with their devoted wives as perhaps the earliest German Catholic pioneers who are deceased:

Henry Berwanger,	Charles Kintzele,
John Pahs,	Joseph Pizareck,
John Seimetz,	Joseph Wellnitz,
August Timm,	Andrew Timm,
Martin Timm	

The names that I have mentioned are not by any means exhaustive of the list. They are the names of the deceased members which occur most often in the oldest parish record books, and they are the names of the men I have heard spoken of most often in connection with the work of founding and building up this parish in the early days. It is right that these names should be mentioned here today, not only because it is befitting the character of this memorial service, but also as an honor to their children and their children's children, and in order that the names

of these men and women and the memory of their services to the church may be handed down to future generations.

I have said that St. Mary's parish, large and prosperous as it is today, is only a development of that little parish of 50 years ago, founded by the zealous priests and laymen mentioned or referred to. The history of the parish gives abundant evidence of this, but I shall content myself with calling your attention to a few broad facts which are especially appropriate it seems to me, to this occasion, and which show that the blessing of God rested with a peculiar fullness upon the life and work of the pioneer Catholics of this congregation.

One of these facts is, that a very large proportion, perhaps the largest proportion of the membership of St. Mary's parish consists today, and has always consisted of the descendants and relatives of the pioneer members. Another fact, which is strikingly significant of the spirit of faith which was so strong in the early days, that of the twenty-six souls from this parish who have devoted themselves specially to the service of God, consisting of five priests, five seminarians, and sixteen sisters, the larger number have also been either direct descendants or relatives of the pioneer families. Again, the two oldest societies in the parish, the Married Ladies' Rosary Society, organized in 1856, and the St. Joseph's Aid Society, established in 1862, which are both still in existence, strong and flourishing, have been, I might say, the parent societies of all the religious organizations in the parish. A glance at the membership of the numerous

societies of today will show that the greater proportion of those who belong to them, and especially of those who have been most active and influential in them, are connected in some way with the devoted men and women who constituted the early membership of the two pioneer religious societies.

One of the most striking evidences of this continuity of parish life is to be found in the field of education. St. Mary's parish is justly proud of her system of schools, with the fine modernly equipped school building, offering opportunity for both primary and secondary education, paralleling the splendid city school system, and all supported by the voluntary contributions of the people of the parish, without either endowments or outside aid of any kind. I know that the present pastor deserves more credit than anyone else for this. He has labored through long years, in season and out of season, to build up and to broaden the schools, and it is saying little in recognition of his splendid work, to say that no priest in the diocese has labored harder or more successfully than he for the advancement of Catholic parish education. This school building will stand as a monument to his zeal, and these hundreds of school children who now tax the capacity of the class rooms, will live to testify to the wisdom of his zeal, as well as to the devotion and self sacrifice of these good Sisters of Notre Dame, and the sound, thorough, and progressive character of their work in the school. But it behooves us, on an occasion such as this not to forget how much of the result here again flows to us from

the labors and sacrifices of priests, sisters and laymen of the past; and that, if St. Mary's parish is able to boast today of a fine school system, if we are able to say today that both priests and people are united as never before in support and defense of the Catholic school, the result is due in very large part to the fact that the generations of today have themselves been trained in a Catholic school, that Catholic schools have existed in this parish from the very beginning, and that, if there is any one thing which stands out clearly and consistently all through the history of the parish, it is that principle which those pioneer Irish and German Catholics brought with them from their Catholic fatherlands and embedded, so to speak, in the very foundation of this parish, the principle of a Catholic school and Catholic education from start to finish for every Catholic child. It was the great Archbishop Hughes who, about the time this parish was forming, gave utterance to the opinion that "the time has come when we must build Catholic schools, even before we build Catholic churches." That was, in fact, the principle the pioneer Catholics of Michigan City acted upon, for we find that as early as 1856, one year before a permanent pastor was appointed, a little school was opened alongside St. Ambrose church, at Washington and Second streets, and two sisters of the Holy Cross came from St. Mary's, Notre Dame, to take charge of it. It did not require much to start a school in those days, once the teachers were gotten. The school appears to have been taught at first in the sisters'

house, two little rooms being set apart for the purpose, and about the only item of expense I can mention which the old parish book records in connection with the opening of the school was \$2 for the making of two teachers' rude desks. Later on, when this present church was built, the old St. Mary's Church building, at the corner of Washington and Fourth streets, was converted into a school, and this continued to be the parish school, until the erection of the new building here near this church under the present pastor. There are many present here this morning who remember well the old St. Mary's school; the two great rooms into which it was divided by a rude partition, the few long rough benches and desks, with the teacher's desk in the middle and towards the wall, the long, home-made black-boards stretching along the walls, such was the place where hundreds of the boys and girls of this parish received the only education they ever had an opportunity of getting. There are many here this morning also who will recall St. Ambrose Academy, standing on what was then a beautiful grassy slope to the west of the old St. Mary's school, and opened about the same time. Intended to furnish an education superior to that of the primary grades, with a fine faculty of teachers and equipped after the fashion of the best academies of the time, St. Ambrose Academy was doubtless, for the Michigan City of those days, an institution that was far ahead of its time. Every vestige of the great

building and every trace of the hill upon which it stood, has long since disappeared, but the memory of the institution, and of the financial burden and loss which it entailed upon those good sisters is a witness I wish to invoke, to testify to the educational zeal of the Sisters of the Holy Cross and of the people and pastors of this parish in former times, as well as to the loftiness of the educational purpose they cherished, and that was cherished in this parish from the beginning.

When we come to consider the life and work of the priests of the parish, we meet this same feature of continuity and development. From the time of the appointment of the first permanent pastor, in 1857, up to the present, St. Mary's parish has had five pastors. The fathers of Notre Dame continued to have charge for the first few years after the parish was organized, Father Paul Gillen being succeeded by the Rev. Dr. Kilroy, famous as the first graduate of the University of Notre Dame. Then, in 1860, came the Rev. George Steiner, a young secular priest just ordained by Bishop Luers, full of zeal and instinct, with the spirit of kindness and geniality that won for him at once the hearts of all, and has caused his name to be handed down in the unwritten records of the parish as that of a true priest of God, a faithful shepherd of his flock, deserving of a place beside the saintly missionaries who had preceded him, as one of the true founders of this parish. Father Steiner, in

fact, may be said to have been the last of the pioneer priests, as well as the first of the pastors of what might be called the modern period in the history of the parish. A German by nationality, he was beloved by Irish and Germans alike, and by non-Catholics as well as Catholics. Under his pastorate, the two little congregations were united, and a way was thus paved for an escape from financial burdens which had resulted from this scattering of forces, as well as for the rapid and substantial progress that was soon to result from their union. But Father Steiner was not able to remain and reap where he had sown; the labors and anxieties of these first four years undermined his constitution; many, even of those who were but children at the time, remember how he came here, as a last token of his fatherly affection for his parish, when he was starting out with Father Becks on that journey to the far southwest from which he was never to return.

It is fitting that we should recall also this morning the name of Father Julius Becks, who succeeded Father Steiner in 1864. It was Father Becks, who, continuing the work of union and expansion inaugurated by his predecessor, purchased the two blocks of church property here and built this church, and it was by his hand that most of those who are now grown up members of the congregation were baptized. There are probably few things more difficult in this world than to manage successfully a

parish of mixed nationalities, and no one who attempts the task can hope to please everybody, or wholly to escape censure and trouble. Father Becks was a faithful pastor of the congregation for twenty-one years, and during nearly the whole of that time he had to struggle hard against financial difficulties springing from the big debt incurred in the building of this church. He was a pastor of the old school, authoritative in appearance and manner, peremptory in whatever related to the carrying out of his plans and ideas, severe in dealing with the abuses of the times, having the habit of preaching long sermons, which he delivered with all the forcefulness of voice and gesture that he was able to demand. This is this tribute to be paid to the memory of Father Becks, and I do not know that any better tribute, after all, could be paid to the memory of any man and that is, that those who knew him longest and most intimately loved him most; there were few if any in the parish who did not come to realize that underneath all that peremptoriness of manner there was always a genial, mirth-loving disposition, and a big, kind, fatherly human heart.

There is one more name that must be mentioned this morning, at this memorial service, another priest of this parish, and he is, I am sure, present to your minds, even before I speak his name. A child of devoted Catholic parents who settled very early in the parish, although not among the pioneers, distin-

guished by the piety of his youth, during the greater part of which, as in the case of the youthful Samuel, his life and duties centered about the sanctuary, there was something priestly about Father Trahey, even before he went to Notre Dame, at the age of 15, to begin his studies. A learned priest at Notre Dame who is regarded as a rare judge of character, said to me not long ago, that no one ever came there as a candidate for the holy priesthood, in all the years that he was there, who was more richly endowed with natural and supernatural qualities befitting the holy priesthood than Father Trahey. While he was making his theological studies, I lived in the same house with him, and I can say that he was truly a model of all that the seminarian ought ideally to be, regular and exact in whatever regarded the rule of his religious life, the current of his life outwardly ran on in an even, monotonous way; but interiorly, it was easy to recognize in him that profound attachment to spiritual things, that abiding earnestness, that fervent zeal and all-embracing purity of intention which betokened a rare and saintly soul, a real man of God. Along with holiness of life, there went a devotion to study and a development of mental power that marked him out as one who was, in the judgment of his professors, destined to accomplish great things. You knew him here as a priest, after he came back crowned with the honors of the University, you saw him at the altar saying mass, you heard his burning words in the

pulpit, like another St. Francis Xavier, moving all hearts to the love of God by what he said and still more by the manner in which he said it—by the magnetic influence of that ardor of divine charity which glowed within him, and which we read of as ever the characteristic of the saints. He was truly the “flower of the flock,” a priest whose career, though brief, was so filled with good works and so informed by the spirit of God that it can never be forgotten, a child of St. Mary’s Parish, the memory of whose holy and zealous life will remain forevermore as a tribute to the depth and fruitfulness of the spirit of faith implanted here by the Catholic pioneers.

History is full of lessons, and the really wise are those who have learned to reverence the past and to read aright its lessons. The history of this parish has its lessons for those of this generation, lessons that have been wrought out for you, my brethren, in the heroic labors of great priests like Brute and Badin, Sorin and Cointet, Shortis and Gillen and Steiner, who first sowed the seeds of faith here; lessons that have been set for you in the solidly christian lives and noble, self-sacrificing, unflinching support of the church by the little band of devoted men and women that gathered around the first missionary priests; lessons of devotion to the principle of christian education, in the lives and labors of those good sisters who labored through all those long years, without material reward or comfort, in the old

parochial schools and academy; lessons that impress themselves upon us, and sometimes painfully in the annals of the parish, as to the mutual love and esteem that ought to animate pastor and people in their relations to each other, if there is to be peace and progress within and edification without; lessons of highest virtue, that shine out for us in a life like that of the lamented Father Trahey.

It is good for us, at a time like this, to pause and listen to those lessons, to gather up the scattered traditions, to record the names and labors of those who have helped to make the parish what it is, for the information and instruction of after generations. Fifty years is a long time in the life of a man, but it is only as a brief interval in the life of the Church of God. St. Mary's Parish, with the celebration of its golden jubilee may feel itself to be no longer young, and yet it is doubtless in only the earlier period of its development. In place of the 120 families, all told, that gathered about Father Steiner in the early 60's, there are now in the two parishes, St. Mary's and St. Stanislaus' not less than 800 families; and in place of the old parochial school that we remember, with 100 children or so, there are now the two large and well equipped parish schools, counting over 700 pupils, with 18 teachers. It is altogether likely that the future will witness an even greater and more rapid growth than these figures indicate, for these great fertile states of the Mississippi valley seem destined to

form, in the Providence of God, the very heart of this vast republic and to become the theatre of its most wonderful development. May the future of St. Mary's Parish, this is the best wish that I can frame for it, be worthy of that past we are endeavoring fittingly to commemorate in this golden jubilee; may its priests be priests who will be worthy to have their names recorded with the names of the great priests of its early history; may its people be worthy descendants in spirit, if not in flesh and blood, of the pioneer Catholics, men and women, who went to form the parish of half a century ago; and may the souls of all whom we commemorate this morning, may the souls of all the faithful departed of this parish, make intercession with God, in return for our prayers, that this parish may ever continue to be, as it has been in the past, a fruitful portion of the harvest field of the Great Master, may ever remain, in the words of Holy Writ, "a holy inheritance," that it may stand in the covenants," and that "good things may continued with it," so that their children for their sakes may remain forever, and their seed and their glory may never be forsaken.

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