



Key Moments in St. Peter's History

A series of historical highlights from the first 200 years of St. Peter – Libertytown.

Dedication of the Third Church

“Woo-hoo!” shouted an excited parishioner, breaking the hush a few seconds after Msgr. Dietzenbach opened the doors. Perhaps a bit more vocal than the consecration 200 years ago of our first church, but no doubt very similar in sentiment to the consecration of our first church. Countless hours, lots of energy and significant effort went into making sure this most recent dedication was as flawless as possible. It was no small undertaking to arrange for a dedication liturgy involving a Cardinal, an Archbishop, 2 Bishops, more than 40 priests and deacons and a congregation numbering 800. Of interest, the youngest parishioner in attendance was Ava Folger, who was only 13 days old on the 7th of September and our most senior parishioner to witness the Dedication was Anne Morrissey, 104 year of age at the time.



Figure 1 Fr. Adam Parker, Master of Ceremonies, delivers last minute instructions to the altar servers inside the Church, while the choir rehearses in the background, September 7, 2008

Two hundred years ago, in 1823, Fr. McElroy's diary contained the following specifics concerning the procession preceding the liturgy of the consecration of the first church:

“... six boys with their albs and sashes – with them we formed a procession – Mr. Egan in front with the Cross and on each side an acolyte with candles followed by the remaining boys and Mr. Wiseman and myself in the rear ...”ⁱ

In contrast, for the September 7, 2008 dedication, a written guide for the order for the liturgy, containing no less than 55 pages, was written specifically for this celebration and contained the following:

“...The one who will be carrying the relics in procession should be just off to the left side of the plaza. On either side of the one to carry the relics will be Acolyte 1 and Acolyte 2, each with a lighted candle. Together they should be ready to insert themselves into the procession into the new church...”

Admission was by ticket only (which were obtained free of charge, but necessary, in order to ensure everyone would have a seat). Tickets were color coded and congregants lined up behind like colored flags in the parking lot, to ensure a smooth procession into the Church.

Unlike a typical Mass, no one entered the church building before the liturgy began. The altar was not decorated, candles were not lit (or even in evidence) and no Blessed Sacrament was in the tabernacle to reverence, before taking a seat. Our Church and altar had not yet been dedicated.



Figure 2 Parishioners line up in parking lot prior to beginning of Dedication Mass, September 7, 2008

On the steps of the new church, with a sea of parishioners standing in the parking lot below, former altar boy Brian Murray, played the bagpipes to welcome the crowd. Msgr. Ditezenbach welcomed Archbishop O'Brien, who received the design plans for the church from Al Rubeling of Rubeling & Associates, the construction documents from Ron Long of Oak Construction Company and the keys to the new Church from Messrs. Chuck O'Connor, Chair of the Building Committee and Mike Riley, president of the Pastoral Council. At the conclusion, of this Introductory Rite, the Archbishop called on the pastor, Msgr.

Dietzenbach, to open the doors of "your beautiful new church" and the parishioners processed inside while the choir sang "Exultat Justi".



Figure 3 Dedication Mass September 7, 2008

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The Archbishop began the sacred celebration by blessing the Church; sprinkling water on the parishioners and the walls of the church. At the conclusion of the Liturgy of the Word and after the Archbishop's homily, the Rite of Dedication commenced. Relics of Saint Francis Xavier, which were retrieved from the second Church after the fire, were placed in a specially prepared opening in the altar and sealed there, by parishioner and then Maintenance Manager, Patrick Spielman. Using chrism, the Archbishop then anointed the altar. Four priests, Msgr. John Dietzenbach, Fr. Keith Boisvert, Fr. Ray Harris and Fr. Jesse Bolger, anointed the four dedication crosses and consecration candles (located on the walls of the four corners of the Church). Frs. Gene Nickol, Lawrence Frazier, Collin Poston and Jack Lombardi then incensed the congregation and walls while the Archbishop incensed the altar. The altar was then wiped of the chrism and decorated with the altar cloth, flowers and candles. Once the altar was set and properly decorated, and

the candles were lit – including the consecration candles (which were lit and then extinguished) and the lights in the Church were turned on full power. The Liturgy of the Eucharist, which with we are so familiar, could now proceed.

After distribution of Holy Communion and during the Closing Rite, both doors of the tabernacle were opened so that the congregation could see through, into the Adoration Chapel. The Tabernacle was incensed and received the Blessed Sacrament for the first time. The candle in the sanctuary lamp (the red lamp which hangs from the ceiling, in the sanctuary on the side of the choir) was then lit. This candle remains lit whenever the Blessed Sacrament is in repose.

Throughout the Mass and Dedication Rite, St. Peter's choir, under the direction of our choir director and parishioner, Sherri Slattery; and a brass ensemble, directed by Elisa Koehler, parishioner and parish council secretary, performed selections specifically chosen for this glorious occasion. 200 years ago St. Peter's did not have its own choir, so the choir from Frederick (St. John the Evangelist) travelled to Liberty(town) to provide musical accompaniment for our first church's consecration.ⁱⁱ This speaks to the importance of music for these liturgical events, as it was no small feat when transportation consisted of horseback or carriage and often involved overnight accommodations.

After the Dedication, the celebrants and parishioners gathered for a reception in Sullivan Hall and under the Pavilion.

At the Dedication, Pastor Dietzenbach said, "Four years ago we gathered here with tears of sorrow. Today we gather with tears of joy." As stated so simply in a Frederick New-Post editorial, "The origin of both those days' tears speaks volumes about the love this parish has for its Church." Years will pass, but the foundation of our faith at St. Peter's remains unchanged; whether we are worshipping in the original stone chapel, the beloved 19th century brick church or our beautiful new 21st century church.

ⁱ Archives of the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus, Box #10/Folder # 14, on deposit at the Booth Family Center for Special Collections, Georgetown University Library, Washington, D.C.

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