

HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
175TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHEDRAL
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My brother Bishops and Priests, Deacons and Religious, and my brothers and sisters in the Lord:

On this joyous spring day, the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, here in our Mother Church, we give thanks to God for the gifts and blessings we have experienced here in our Archdiocese over the last 175 years. We give thanks to God for those who formed and shaped our local Church of Detroit from the days of the first missionaries unto this day and hour. On this occasion, we not only remember the past but we also renew our commitment to continue to be a voice and presence proclaiming the Gospel of Life in word and deed.

For my homily today, I would like to touch on three themes: first of all, the guiding hand of God's providence in the story of our lives; secondly, the way our diversity of cultures, languages, ethnic and racial traditions come together in communion through a spiritual sharing of gifts; and finally, hopes and dreams for our future.

Every anniversary affords us an opportunity to pause and remember, to consider with joy and gratitude, the blessings we have received. With the serenity

of time, we can put into perspective the events, people, and experiences that have made us who we are today. Even now, 175 years later, many of the things that have happened, and the way they have happened, have no obvious human logic or clear explanation; ultimately, our personal and communal history is always something of a mystery. Here and now, we see only a shadow of what we will come to enjoy and understand in God's Kingdom. For now, we live with many mysteries of faith – such as the Holy Trinity, and yet, we find our peace and joy, meaning and comfort, in celebrating and proclaiming these mysteries which define our lives.

We believe that God is always present and at work – even through tragedies and sufferings and the apparent “accidents” of history.

For example, after the great fire of 1801, who would have ever dreamed that Detroit would rise out of the ashes and become a great industrial center of the Midwest? Could anyone have imagined that Ste. Anne’s, our oldest parish, would be built and rebuilt eight times? How was it that Bishop Gallagher had the courage – even the audacity – to construct Sacred Heart Major Seminary, the Chancery, and the Bishop’s Residence amid the uncertain economic times of the Great Depression? What inspired Cardinal Mooney to spearhead the creation of St. John Provincial Seminary after World War II? As Cardinal Dearden returned from Vatican II and initiated the Synod 69, did he realize that he was shaping the

structures and processes that are still in use today and have been copied throughout the nation?

Is it not extraordinary that humble priests like Father Solanus Casey, OFM Cap., Monsignor Clem Kern, or Father William Cunningham, in carrying out their duties, created a whole new landscape for the Church and the metro area? Where would this Archdiocese be without the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary or the Felician Sisters of Livonia, the Dominicans of Adrian, and so on?

Certainly, over the years, some names of lay leaders stand out with special prominence – Jane Wolford Hughes, a national figure in developing programs of adult faith formation after Vatican II. Eleanor Josaitis continues to be a blessing with the work of Focus: Hope, a national paradigm for bringing together the resources of business, government and Church. Perhaps the most significant people of our faith heritage are names known only to God, unsung heroes of the laity, who raised their families, shared the faith with their children, and put their faith into concrete action through works of justice and peace in the marketplace, offices, factories, or the world of the professions.

Truly, the providential hand of God has been at work throughout the decades, inspiring, motivating, and sustaining our Church as we have lived through the ebb and flow of years of growth and expansion, as well as times of unrest, diminishment, and rebuilding. Just as Metro Detroit has continually had to pull

itself up out of difficulties and challenges, the same has been true for the Church. But through it all, the Holy Spirit has inspired confidence and hope, strength and courage.

In fact, the Holy Spirit, working through the Church, has often been an agent for reform and renewal of our society. Among other things today, we can rightly rejoice and celebrate the way our strong presence and united voice have affirmed the dignity of all persons – the rights of the unborn, workers, and immigrants, as well as the psychologically and mentally challenged. Our belief in the mysteries of faith does not pull us away from social concerns but, rather, makes us all the more sensitive to all human needs, gifts, and possibilities. As today's Gospel reminds us, our belief in the Triune God challenges us to work and pray for the salvation of all the world, a salvation which necessarily includes a concern for all that is authentically human.

As the gifts and needs of the metro area Church have evolved over the decades, the Church has always been ready with a response of hope and a new vision for society. Consider for example, the gift that Focus: Hope has been for our metro area and our nation, a sign of new beginnings and new harmony born in the dark hours of the civil unrest of the late 1960s.

Within the Church as well, God's providential care has brought together the right resources just as particular needs emerged. Consider, for example, the many

ways Sacred Heart Major Seminary has changed and evolved over the decades, focusing today on the international character of priestly formation and a whole spectrum of ministerial formation – deacons, pastoral ministers, and youth ministers.

Over the decades, there have been many years of loss and disappointment as parishes and schools merged or closed, but yet, out of these painful times, new growth has always come forth, and the work of evangelization has continued in ever-new ways. As I stated earlier, we are living the mysteries of faith; we are part of a larger drama of salvation and we can never completely evaluate or appreciate our moment in history. And so, we learn from the past, celebrate the present, and look to the future with trust and confidence.

These thoughts bring me to my second point: how our ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity have truly been an asset for our local Church of Detroit. As a metro area, Detroit represents the blending together, in a very harmonious way, many generations of immigrants, a mosaic of more than 100 different ethnic groups. From foundations of French and English settlers, our metro area quickly became home to people from Eastern and Southern Europe, as well as African-Americans; the promise of employment brought people from almost everywhere around the globe and, in more recent years, we have been blessed by a steady influx of people from Hispanic cultures and from the countries of Asia.

Our ethnic and racial diversity is one of the most powerful ways we share gifts and stretch each other to ever-greater appreciation of the mystery of our Trinitarian God and our Church Universal. As God is “unity-in-diversity,” so, too, the Church. As the three persons of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – are perfect in their giving and receiving, so, too, we are called to enter into their dynamic process of love through mutuality and reciprocity, giving and receiving in word and deed.

Throughout his long career as a scholar, and now as our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI has consistently emphasized that a critical starting point for all Christian theology is recognizing that, as human beings, we are basically receivers. Everything that we are and everything that we have is a gift of God... and God would never give us anything or allow anything unless there was in it the potential for us to share more deeply in His goodness. One of the challenges of our lives – individually and communally – is learning to appreciate the extraordinary gifts of God which surround us on all sides. Every gift is indeed a mystery, something that needs to be unpacked or opened.

The mystery of the Holy Trinity, whose feast we celebrate, reminds us that as God is relational, a communion of persons. We, too, develop our personalities through self-donation, by giving to others all that which we have received. Just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share equally the one divine nature, we are called to

recognize that, in God's eyes, we are all fundamentally equal; all our titles, experiences, or offices are so many gifts or charisms to be shared with others, to build up the whole Church. In a very powerful way, here in our Church of Detroit throughout the decades, the Catholic Church has brought together people who might otherwise have been afraid of each other. To be sure, there is still the natural human element of competition and parochialism, but little by little, through the Vicariate Planning Process of recent years, we have come to appreciate the true blessing and gift of our diversity, the way we mirror the Church Universal and the mystery of our Triune God.

Finally, I would like to take a few minutes to dream with you about the future. I must admit I feel a bit like Moses on Mount Nebo looking toward the Promised Land, knowing that someone else would be leading God's people on the next stage of their journey. Having served as your Archbishop for these 18 years, I have had the opportunity to see firsthand the life of the Church on every level – from the immediacy of the eager faces of children in classrooms of Catholic schools and religious education programs to gatherings of families at the bedside of loved ones in Angela Hospice. I have been a part of clergy discussions and APC meetings, and beautiful Cathedral liturgies such as today.

From core city to first-ring suburbs to ex-burbs and the rural areas of our Archdiocese, I have witnessed the intensity and fidelity of the faith of the people of

God. In every part of the Archdiocese, and throughout all the different voices I hear, there is a consistency of hope about the Church of the future. Clergy, religious, and laity are working together in every aspect of the life and ministry of the Church. There is mutual respect for diversity of roles and a growing appreciation of how we can share resources for the strengthening of our parishes and schools.

St. John's Center and Sacred Heart Major Seminary will continue to be the foundation stones for the future of our Church: from their chapels, classrooms, and conference rooms, leaders will be formed and renewed for the challenges of the new evangelization, revitalizing faith within the hearts of believers and witnessing Gospel values to the wider society around us. As St. Paul reminds us in today's second reading, we will best proclaim the Gospel precisely by our own unity in the faith.

As we learn from the Holy Trinity, our attention must always be directed outward; if God is "missionary" in his love and energy, as his Church, we must do the same. Missionaries brought us the faith and we must be missionaries to the next generation and the generations to come as our children and grandchildren call forth from us ever-new responses of faith, hope, and love. As the Russian writer Dostoevsky once said, "*The world will be saved by beauty.*" As today's Gospel teaches, the beauty we proclaim is the mystery of Christ's cross, the wonder of

“unity-in-diversity,” our conviction that wherever there is struggle or death, resurrection is dawning. The providential hand of God has guided our Church and helped us to bridge the generations. We rejoice this day that we truly live the mystery of the Triune God, a communion for the sake of mission, a unity-in-diversity. To God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be the glory now and for endless ages. Amen. Alleluia.