

100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Ezekiel 36:11-16  
1 Peter 2:4-9  
John 15:9-17

Sacred Heart Church, Greenville, MS  
Saturday, August 31, 2013 – 10:00 a.m.

Your Excellencies, Bishop Joseph Latino and Bishop William Houck -- Very Reverend Father Provincial James Pawlicki -- Reverend Father Thomas Mullally, Pastor of this Local Church -- my Brother Priests -- Consecrated Women and Men Religious -- my Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Theme: "Celebrating 100 years of Enduring Faith, Education and Evangelization"

This week is a *time to remember*. Wednesday was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. It was a week-long celebration of events at the National Mall and throughout the nation, featuring (focusing on) the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his "I Have a Dream" speech as the clarion call of the Civil Rights Movement and the challenge to continue the unfinished business of equality and justice for all Americans.

Today we gather in Greenville to commemorate and celebrate the establishment of Sacred Heart Catholic Church – "Celebrating 100 Years of Enduring Faith, Education and Evangelization."

As we celebrate this anniversary, we are reminded that this Parish was born out of a dream, a vision, a concern of a local Pastor who saw the need to share the Catholic Faith, to provide education and to evangelize the Colored people of Greenville [that's what we were called in those days – Colored people].

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Father A. J. **Korstenbroek**, Pastor of St. Joseph Church in Greenville, made his dream known to Bishop John Edward Gunn of Natchez.

On January 10, 1912, Bishop Gunn officially signed the decree for the erection of the parish. And he entrusted the building and staffing of the new parish to the Divine Word Missionaries who had begun ministry to Colored Catholics in the Diocese of Natchez in 1905. With a substantial contribution from Mother Katharine Drexel (now Saint Katharine Drexel), the Foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, property was purchased and the building program was begun immediately. By the end of summer 1913, the new parish had adequate facilities for church services and a new school. The Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit staffed the school.

God blessed the new church and school with rapid growth. While the new school was providing a solid foundation in academics and faith formation for the children, the church was putting in place programs to educate and form adults in the Catholic Faith. Those early Divine Word Missionaries were pleased with the response of the people to their efforts to bring the Gospel of Jesus and education to the community.

But they were convinced that African Americans would not become Catholic in large numbers until they had priests and Brothers of their own race. So they held a meeting on December 14, 1914 to discuss this subject and agreed unanimously to begin plans to establish a Black clergy in Mississippi. Six years later, with the approval of Bishop John Gunn of Natchez and the blessing of Pope Benedict XV, Father Matthew Christmann, at that time Pastor of Sacred Heart Church, began the first seminary for Black candidates in the United States on these hallowed grounds of Sacred Heart Parish in the Fall of 1920. In 1923, however, Father Christmann moved with Saint Augustine Seminary to a permanent location in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. That effort was also successful. The first class was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Richard Gerow on May 23, 1934 – Fathers Anthony Bourges, Maurice Rousseve, Francis Wade and Vincent Smith. By the middle 60's over one hundred African American priests were ordained at Saint Augustine Seminary. And nine of them have been appointed to serve the Church as bishops.

Among the many significant events that crown the history of Sacred Heart Parish are two First Mass celebrations – Father Herman Porter on Sunday, June 29, 1947, and (15 years later) Father Charles Dixon

Burns, SVD, a graduate of Sacred Heart School, celebrated his first Mass here on March 25, 1962.

We are truly blessed to be here this morning **“Celebrating 100 years of Enduring Faith, Education and Evangelization.”** You can be justly proud of a long list of achievements and numerous contributions that you the people of Sacred Heart have made to the Church and the people of the Greenville community. Sacred Heart is the church of your **great** grandparents, the church of your grandparents, and the church of your mothers and fathers. Every generation collaborated with their Religious Leaders to fashion a parish where God’s people are cared for with great pastoral sensitivity and total dedication. It is your responsibility now to continue that tradition and ensure that Sacred Heart continues to be the church of your children and your grandchildren.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus reminds us of the message that the Divine Word Missionaries brought to Sacred Heart in 1913 and that they preached throughout their lives – the same message repeated throughout the last 100 years. That message is Jesus’ *command to love one another as he loves us.*

As we reflect on the centennial of the Parish and Jesus' command to love one another, we might ask, **Is love really what the people of Sacred Heart and the world need today?** Bear in mind that this command of Jesus is taken from his teachings at the Last Supper. He had almost finished his ministry on earth, the ministry given to him by his Father. Throughout his ministry, Jesus had cured the sick, removed fear and oppression from people's lives, fed the hungry, spoke the truth, and raised the dead to life. Jesus was all about life, love, and inviting his Apostles and followers to have the same attitude. At the end of his ministry, **Jesus realized that what the world needed most was love.** The love that Jesus taught is the only weapon that will conquer the world and bring peace to the nations.

To bring a new vision to the world, a **call to love one another** was the **mission of Jesus**. Jesus gave us a new commandment which was to **love everyone as he loved**. By this love will all know the disciples of Jesus. Humble **love of God and neighbor** was to be the guideline for those who would follow Jesus. Jesus called it a **new commandment** because he gave it to his followers as their distinctive mark. From then on, Christian society would be challenged with this new law. Real human progress in future ages would be measured according to the fulfillment of the law of

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love, the new commandment. Love of neighbor became the identification badge of every Christian. Non-Christians, in observing the Christian way of life, remarked, "See how they love one another."

Today, as we thank God for "100 years of Enduring **Faith, Education and Evangelization**" at Sacred Heart, we pray for the gift of greater awareness, strength, and courage to wear proudly our identification badge of **love** so that, in all our relationships with others, we may be known as true disciples of the Lord Jesus.

As you move into a second century of service to this community, may you continue to be faithful to the legacy handed down by your founders and their successors by the active living out of the precious gift **faith** and **love** that the Lord has given you. And may the Sacred Heart of Jesus and our Blessed Mother Mary continue to watch over you and protect you and help you to be genuine witnesses of the Lord to the community of Greenville. God bless you!