

Diocesan News

DIOCESE OF CHRISTCHURCH

(From our own correspondent.)

December 29.

His Lordship the Bishop desires me to state that the annual diocesan retreat of the clergy is fixed for January 17, at the Cathedral, and is to be conducted by the Very Rev. the Rector of the Redemptorist Fathers. This may be accepted as the official notification.

The Feast of the Nativity was ushered in on Sunday evening at Vespers, when the Rev. Father O'Connell preached an impressive sermon on the subject. The choir sang the 'Adeste Fideles,' solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament being afterwards given by his Lordship the Bishop, attended by the Rev. Fathers Mahony and Peoples.

Speaking in the Cathedral on Sunday morning the Very Rev. Vicar-General, referring to the approaching festive occasion, said although not given to paying compliments, he could not refrain from thanking all those in various capacities of church and parochial work for cheerful, generous, and whole-hearted services rendered year after year. The gratitude he felt was beyond him to adequately express.

At St. Joseph's Church, Lyttelton, on Christmas Day, besides the earlier Masses there was a Missa Cantata at 10.30 o'clock at which Gregorian music was rendered for the first time. The Rev. Father Cooney celebrated all the Masses. In the evening there were the usual devotions. There were large congregations, and the church was beautifully decorated by the Sisters of Mercy.

The first Christmas of the Sisters of Nazareth in New Zealand was fittingly celebrated at Nazareth House. With kindly thoughtfulness his Lordship provided a Christmas tree laden with toys for the little ones, and was also present at the distribution. On Christmas morning Masses were celebrated by the chaplain (the Rev. Father Mahony), and in the afternoon Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was given by his Lordship the Bishop, prior to which he addressed in appropriate terms the community and inmates. An abundance of all needed to gladden the hearts of everyone, old and young, was dispensed on the festive occasion.

The numerous friends of the great institute of Mount Magdala and Sacred Heart Orphanage and Industrial School, by supplying the necessities, enabled the good Sisters to provide for the Christmas festivities, and make the occasion one of great rejoicing. The children of the orphanage were particularly gladdened by a well stocked Christmas tree, furnished by his Lordship Bishop Grimes.

In the Cathedral on Christmas Day Masses were celebrated continuously from six o'clock until ten, each largely attended, and very many approaching the Holy Table. At eleven o'clock there was Pontifical High Mass. His Lordship the Bishop was celebrant, the Very Rev. Father Le Menant des Chesnais, S.M., V.G., assistant priest, the Rev. Father Mahony deacon, Rev. Father Peoples subdeacon, and Rev. Father O'Connell master of ceremonies. The music was Gounod's 'Messe Troisième,' capably rendered by the choir, Mr. H. H. Loughnan conducting and Miss Katie Young presiding at the organ. His Lordship the Bishop briefly addressed the congregation on the lesson of the Nativity. The people, he said, were invited by the Church to gather around the crib and adore that Child Who was God from the beginning, and was now made flesh. That Child, Who had been born in a manger, might have come down in splendor, might have been born in a gilded palace, but He had chosen to lower and humiliate Himself, to be wholly poor. He had abased Himself to uplift humanity, to give men power to become the sons of God. His Lordship impressed his hearers with this lesson of humility and love, telling them finally that the Church took up the song that the angels sang on the eve of the first Christmas, 'Glory be to God on High, and Peace on earth to men of good will.' At the conclusion of the Mass the Bishop imparted the Papal blessing.

In the evening there were Solemn Pontifical Vespers and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, his Lordship being attended by the same clergy as in the morning. The Bishop, after giving his episcopal blessing, said that, on behalf of all his clergy and himself, he was pleased to wish the people all the joys of the season. He thanked all his priests for their untiring efforts during the year, and, on behalf of the parish, he expressed gratitude to all who had contributed in any

way to make the magnificent ceremonies of Sunday evening and Monday the success which, he hoped, they had been. He would also thank those who had given their time and taste to the adornment of the Cathedral, the sacristan, the sanctuary boys, the choirmaster, and the collectors. His Lordship concluded with making an appeal to the congregation to remove the incubus of debt from the Cathedral. He warmly expressed thanks to all who had helped to raise the magnificent basilica, but he mentioned that the first Christmas services celebrated within its walls were not without a shadow. In the middle of the joy, he said, there was a note of sadness. He would have liked to have seen this offering to God free and untrammelled. Though the debt was still heavy, he added, he had, during the past few days, enjoyed a certain consolation. A gentleman filling an important position in New Zealand had remarked to him: 'There is nothing like this Cathedral in Australasia. It is a national monument, and, as such, I would like you to allow me to give you a few pounds for a few years till the church is paid for. You have a national monument, and all should contribute to it.' This gentleman, the Bishop explained, was not a member of his diocese, and he instanced a parallel case. A third person had stated: 'It is a dreadful debt; it is an awful burden. I will give you £100 if some others will do the same.' 'I have great sympathy for you, and the people of the diocese should make an effort to support you. I would give £10 or £20 if you could only get others to contribute. The fulfilment of these promises, his Lordship continued, rested with the people of the diocese. If they helped themselves, others would help them. If ninety-nine persons would give £100 each there would be no need to trouble about the debt. It was not necessary that ninety-nine individuals should provide all the money. People could band together in groups and furnish quotas of £100 between them. 'It is very simple,' he concluded. 'There is the plan, and it only wants being put into execution. There is a resolution for the new year—to remove this incubus of debt. Then we will have no more annoyance with material, financial affairs, but will be able to work, as we are intended, for the spiritual welfare of the diocese.'

The decorations of the sanctuary and high altar were very beautiful. Palms and pot plants were so arranged in the sanctuary as to effect a delicate green tracery on the pure white stone pillars and colonnades. Arum lilies, Christmas lilies, and bright red blooms most tastefully adorned the high altar, the whole affording a spectacle chaste in the extreme. The altars of the side chapels, notably those of the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Virgin, were also beautifully adorned, the same loving attention being bestowed on those of St. Joseph, St. Patrick, St. Anthony, and others. The whole scheme of adornment and material provided were due to Miss Rose White, whose devoted labors cannot be too highly appreciated.

The customary crib, symbolic of the Stable of Bethlehem, was erected by Mr. Frank Geoghegan, sacristan, and a few willing helpers. After Vespers the members of the choir were entertained by the Bishop at the episcopal residence. His Lordship had previously congratulated the choir for its service during the year, especially those who had striven to help to carry out the instructions of his Holiness the Pope with regard to church music, and he supplemented this with thanks for the day's work, making special reference to the choir-master (Mr. H. H. Loughnan) and the organist (Miss Katie Young).

Although the best accommodation the Railway Department felt disposed to grant for the Catholic excursion to the Riccarton Racecourse on Boxing Day was open waggons, still his Lordship the Bishop was contented to take his seat among the happy throng and appeared content to extract all the enjoyment possible from such a method of transit. Needless to remark the whole trainful of passengers felt highly honored at his presence amongst them. The local and visiting clergy found themselves dispersed among the people in all parts of the train. Outward and homeward every detail passed off with punctuality and dispatch, thanks to the foresight and admirable management of the secretary, Mr. E. O'Connor.

Timaru

(From our own correspondent.)

December 25.

On Saturday evening Father Le Floch received a welcome Christmas gift in the shape of a cheque for £30 to erect a bell for the church. This thoughtful offering came from one of the staunchest Catholics in the St. Andrews district.

With the 2d.

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