

Growth of the Church in America

In the course of his sermon in the Cathedral, Baltimore, on the first Sunday of October, his Eminence Cardinal Gibbons, gave public expression to his grateful appreciation of the civic celebration held in his honor during the summer, and referred to the religious festivities which were to be held during the week beginning October 15. He made a comparison of the conditions of the Church at the beginning of his career and at the present time. In the course of this historical resume he said:

'All the priests that were ordained for this diocese with me, and before my time, have long since passed away, and all my Episcopal brethren with whom I began to labor after my consecration, 43 years ago, have gone to their reward, with one solitary exception, and that exception is the venerable Bishop of Kansas City. Though I value the friendship of my junior colleagues, I feel a sense of loneliness in the absence of my old companions with whom I sat so often in the council and with whom I labored so long in the vineyard of the Lord.

'At the close of the Third Plenary Council, in 1884, the patriarchal Archbishop of St. Louis, addressing me in the name of his colleagues, remarked that when Xerxes, the Persian leader, beheld over a million of soldiers standing before him in martial array, he shed tears on reflecting that in 100 years this grand army would have perished from the face of the earth. "And in fifty years," the Archbishop added, "all the prelates assembled in this Cathedral shall have paid the debt of nature."

"That is true," I replied, "but thank God, we are immortal, for the present life is but the prelude of that which is to come, and we shall meet again in the temple of which God Himself is the architect, for

we know that if this our earthly habitation is dissolved, we have a house of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

'Of the 72 prelates who attended the Council of 1884 all but nine have paid the debt of nature.

'It may be interesting as well as consoling to institute a comparison between the Church of 1861 and its present situation after half a century.

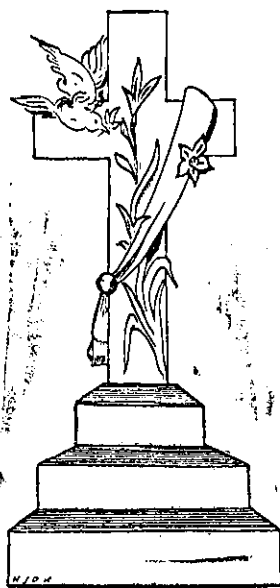
'In 1861 the Archbishops and Bishops of the United States numbered 48. The priests were 2064. The number of churches with priests attached was 2042, and the Catholic population was estimated at 1,860,000.

'The number of Archbishops and Bishops to-day in charge of Sees amounts to 96, twice as many as existed in 1861. The priests amount to 17,000, an increase of more than eight-fold. There are 13,500 churches, nearly a seven-fold increase. We have about 15,000,000 Church members, eight times as many as existed in the United States in 1861.

'But the progress of religion in our country is to be estimated not only by the augmentation of the number of its communicants but also by a more efficient co-ordination and discipline. The clergy, in 1861, were as detached squadrons compared to the compact and well marshalled army of to-day.

'Half a century ago the prelates and clergy labored under many adverse circumstances. In widely extended parts of the country they had to minister to the faithful scattered over a vast expanse of territory, without organised parishes, often without churches wherein to worship, and without Catholic schools. They had but scant resources to sustain them. Frequently they had to contend with deep-rooted prejudices.

'Now, thank God, we have in most places parishes well organised. Churches have multiplied from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Parochial schools have become the rule instead of the exception in the large centres



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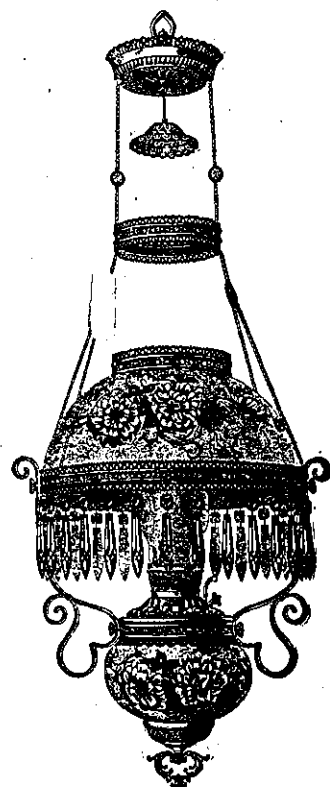
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