

**Homily**  
**On the Occasion of the**  
**Centenary of the Church Building**  
**Of St. Patrick Parish**  
**Imogene, Iowa**  
**July 11, 2015**  
**Bishop Richard Pates**

My friends in Christ,

It is a great honor for me to share with you the festivities of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Patrick Church building here in Imogene. This remarkable edifice stands on the hill as a symbol of faith to all. We are called to look up and see that God is the source of all blessing.

I am grateful for Father Bill Leahy, the President of Boston College and St. Patrick's sole priestly vocation, for delivering these words on my behalf. If you are going to have one such vocation it is advisable to generate a person of the stature of Father Leahy. He renders great leadership to American Higher Catholic Education. Recently, I had surgery for a polyp on my vocal chords. It has temporarily impaired my speaking and thus I am appreciative that Father Kunnel suggested that Father Leahy be my voice today.

A Sacrament is a physical reality which conveys God's presence and facilitates relationship and contact with God. We are aware that the universal Church is such a reality for the world. Another example for us Catholics is that central to our faith journey through life are the seven sacraments.

Because the St. Patrick Church building represents the very best of human construction I suggest it serves as a sacrament. It speaks to us of our God and enables us as community and individuals to enter into relationship with Him.

The obvious feature of the Church that gives insight into this sacramental identity is its remarkable beauty. Father Edmund Hayes, the first residential Pastor who was assigned to St. Patrick's in 1888, was the individual who had the imagination, energy, taste and conveniently

enough wealth to devote much of his life to the building of this Church. English-Gothic in style it was the third in the parish's history.

Supported by ample family money and in tandem with architect Harry Lawrie and Omaha contractors Ed and Jack Sprague, Father Hayes conceived and then proceeded to oversee the development of this remarkable structure.

Today we stand in awe:

- At the remarkable Carrara marble altars from Pietrasanta, Italy. They alone render a fascinating history. Their predecessors lay at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. The story of assembly of these altars, after arriving here, under the direction of Italian Sculptor, Enrico Tonnegetti, could fill a book.
- At the exterior of the Church built with the best grade of black hylex brick
- At the Stations of the Cross recognized widely for their unique character.
- At the beautiful bell tower which stands 80 feet tall. It is a welcoming beacon to all in the surrounding region.
- At the remarkable stained glass windows from Munich, Germany. The image of the face of St. Patrick stands out as that particular window was returned three times to its artist until the face of Patrick satisfied the perception of Father Hayes.

Father Hayes, a capable orator and known for his lengthy sermons, assured the people that the pews produced in Cleveland would be comfortable through an hour's sermon.

Though designated on the National Registry of Historic Places, on July 7, 1983, the stunningly beautiful church does not stand as a museum. Over the past 100 years it has embraced a live, pulsating community growing in the ways of God and rendering faithful religious witness to the surrounding community.

The reading from the letter to the Ephesians in today's liturgy conveys characteristics of the St. Patrick Parish community still very prominent today.

As St. Paul observed was the case with the Church of Ephesus, the members of this Imogene community have come to know themselves as adopted children of God's family through incorporation into the very life of Jesus especially through Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist.

The Director of Faith Formation, Maria Blake, explains how the 80 some children in Faith Formation are introduced to Jesus in order to come to know him personally in their lives. It is the foundational experience of faith. The teenagers, who are in the confirmation class, have taken hold of this relationship and solidified it by both their questions and their growing participation in the sacramental and community life of St. Patrick. They are attractive and provide youthful inspiration and life.

The parish community enriches itself by blending newcomers and long-standing families who have been stalwarts of the community for decades. In this manner, they grow more deeply in the realization of the redemption that has been achieved for them through Jesus. They are introduced into the marvelous mystery that God has shared with them in the sacraments, in their enduring friendships with one another and in their outreach to others, particularly those in need.

In order to be ever relevant and yet secure in the truth, the community is grounded in the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit points them beyond the attraction of the stunning Church building to an inheritance with God, the ever-loving Father, in his Kingdom. Thus, the focus is for everyone to activate now what God calls us to ultimately be and which will last forever. St. Patrick's Parish continues to grow as the Body of Christ making him present in their compassion, understanding and love for one another as well as to the extended members in the broader human family.

Today, we rejoice and express gratitude to all who have been so instrumental in organizing the refurbishing of the Church so that it can continue as a powerful sacrament. In particular, appreciation is extended to co-chairs of the centennial celebration, Dan Kinsella and Margaret Laughlin. They represent the spirit and participation of so many who greatly love their Church but love even more the community of faith constituting St. Patrick's. The parishioners of St.

Patrick do not hold back in their generosity and sacrifice thus enabling the Body of Christ to continue to thrive and grow in our times.

In order for a community to reach authentic identity, leadership and selfless service are required. St. Patrick's has been blessed with a long list of Pastors all of whom contributed in their own ways to the fabric of the Parish. Two pastors are especially revered in the history. We have spoken of Father Edmund Hayes and his productive stint as the one primarily responsible for the church building. He was succeeded by Father Francis Doyle who served from 1928 until 1966 in the role of pastoral leader. Their combined pastorate was 78 years. Their record is testament that Church and community are obviously sustained by stability.

Today, the parish continues the rich tradition of generous pastoral leadership. The community is blessed with the ministry of Father Tom Kunnel who is from India. His tradition and background have come together to develop a rich partnership with a believing community that grows in vitality and spirit.

I am very honored to come to Imogene and St. Patrick's Parish for this memorable milestone. It is a pleasure to join the "sons and daughters of Imogene" for the civic celebration of "Shamrock Days." Some 800 or so visitors here have flocked to town this weekend and link with the 145 standing families of St. Patrick Parish. They pay tribute to the singular Church building in which birth in Christ occurred, and which life was then further nourished under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This faith continues to be the guiding light providing meaning for the earthly pilgrimage wherever these individuals find themselves in life.