

1903-1946: A New Century Of Catholicism

"A towering, impressive figure he was, with an eloquence to match his bearing," was the way Monsignor Michael Owens recalled the fourth bishop (third archbishop) of St. Louis, John Joseph Glennon. And during his 43 years shepherding of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, Glennon's goal was to see that the Church as well became a towering, eloquent, and impressive presence.

The "eloquent builder" was born in Kinnegad, County Meath, Ireland, in 1862. John Glennon, while at All Hallows Seminary in Dublin, accepted the invitation of the Bishop of Kansas City, John Hogan, to volunteer for service in his diocese, and there he was ordained in 1884. Impressing Hogan with his administrative skills and speaking ability, Glennon became his coadjutor bishop in 1896. When John Kain, the Archbishop of St. Louis, died on October 3, 1902, not many were surprised when Glennon, although only 41 years old, was appointed to succeed him.

While in awe at the heritage and importance of his new archdiocese, the new, boyish young shepherd also felt strongly that the Church there should be more visible, vibrant and confident. In a famous earlier address, Glennon had described the archdiocese in somewhat cryptic terms: "By the rolling waters of the Mississippi, the Lion of the West lies sleeping, and if the waters could speak as they flow, their every wavelet would echo the greatness of his name. For there is not a stream tributary to that mighty river that does not reflect the golden cross of St. Louis." Glennon's mission was to "awaken" the dormant potential of the great archdiocese he inherited.

Keep in mind that the extent of the new archbishop's jurisdiction included the entirety of the eastern half of the state of Missouri. For organizational purposes, he noted three centers of Catholicism in his new vineyard: the city of St. Louis itself, with a "suburban area"—Kirkwood, Webster Groves, Florissant, Maplewood, for instance—beginning to expand; then the venerable Catholic settlements along the Missouri, such as St. Charles, Augusta, Washington, and Herman; and, thirdly, the distinguished strongholds along the Mississippi such as Ste. Genevieve.

What initially captivated Glennon's imagination was the city itself. A year after his arrival, the eyes of the world were locked upon the city as it hosted the colorful 1904 World's Fair. The astute Glennon realized that Chicago, the "Railroad City," had eclipsed St. Louis, the "River City," as the dominant locus for business in the Midwest. His goal was to see that nothing overshadowed its ecclesiastical dominance.

In his vision, what would most symbolize the wealth of the heritage of the archdiocese, as well as the promise of its future, would be a magnificent new cathedral. The one on the riverfront he had inherited, while a historical jewel, was in the middle of a deteriorating and embarrassing section of the city. The corner of Lindell and Newstead, already purchased by his predecessor, was in a growing, affluent part of the city, a stroll's distance from the site of the World's Fair. October 18, 1908, saw the laying of the cornerstone for what Glennon planned to be the largest and most ornate cathedral in America. His dreams would become history 18 years later when, on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, in the centennial year of the diocese, June 29, 1926, the grand St. Louis Cathedral, which Pope Paul VI would later call "the most beautiful church in the new world," was dedicated.

But the Body of Christ, the Church, is even more importantly composed of "living stones," and thus would the Holy Spirit continue to animate the Church in the archdiocese under Archbishop Glennon's leadership. Perhaps the most obvious, albeit often overlooked, way in which people continued to meet Jesus in His Church was in the wonderful Catholic genius of "neighborhood parishes." For the overwhelming majority of Catholics, both in the expanding city and in the countryside, the focal point of life was the parish. Especially in the city did one answer the question, "Where are you from?" by naming his or her parish. From Holy Name in the northern part of the city to St. Anthony in the southern, parishes, with their rich array of liturgical, devotional, educational, social, athletic, cultural and charitable activities, always governed by a highly-regarded, princely pastor, and supported by admired women religious, became the center of life for Catholic families. As one gentleman who grew up in St. John the Baptist Parish observed, "I was born in the family house on Itaska, baptized in the parish church, and my childhood became those blocks, corners, and ball fields around the parish. The kids with whom I grew up are still among my best friends. I opened my first savings account in the parish credit union; when dad was out of work during the Depression, the St. Vincent de Paul Society paid our rent; when grandma, who lived with us, got sick, the priests came to see her; I wouldn't miss serving Mass, playing soccer, or Tuesday night devotions at the parish, and the best lessons I ever learned were from the sisters in grade school. My first job was from a grocer in the parish, my first date with a girl on a CYC outing; the first time I ever cried in public was at my mom's funeral in the Church, and the girl I married lived down the street. And all we wanted to do was buy a house in the same neighborhood and do for our kids what our folks had done for us. St. John the Baptist Parish was our whole life."

This centrality of parish life, still the genius of Catholicism, was especially dominant in the archdiocese in the Glennon years. Particularly was the parish—whether Our Lady Help of Christians for the Sicilians, St. John Nepomuk for the Bohemians, or St. Stanislaus for the Poles—important for the immigrants who continued to arrive from southern and central Europe, as they had earlier from Ireland and Germany, up until the mid-1920s. These refugees looked to the parish not only for sustenance for the soul, but for help in finding housing, jobs, citizenship, and lessons in English. For them, the parish was integral for survival of soul and body, and St. Louis was blessed with dozens of these "base communities" which handed on the faith.

Archbishop Glennon's solicitude, though, extended also to the outlying countryside. Himself of a country background in rural Ireland, Glennon believed that the agrarian life was especially conducive to sturdy family life and Christian virtue. Thus, for instance, in 1923 he hosted the first meeting of what would become the National Catholic Rural Life Conference at the Melbourne Hotel in St. Louis, telling the participants that the Church was too urban-oriented, and needed to extend more pastoral care to Catholics in the countryside. Even earlier, he sponsored projects in what was called "rural colonization," whereby Catholics barely surviving in the teeming cities were given parcels of land in the country on which to raise families and earn a living. As concluded in the study of one such colony, Glennonville, actually dedicated to the archbishop, as impractical and romantic as the whole concept of Catholic rural colonization might be, Glennon still deserves credit for demonstrating some daring in his care for rural Catholics.

In the apostolate to the countryside, the archdiocese claims one of the more colorful leaders in the legendary priest, "Alfalfa George" Hildner, who showed remarkable skill in agrarian ministry in his parishes at Claryville in Perry County, and later St. John Gildehaus in Villa Ridge. Nothing was outside of Monsignor Hildner's pastoral concern,

from crop rotation, farm cooperatives, and flood control, to credit unions, university extension programs and vacation religious schools.

Stemming from a vibrant rural Catholicism came liturgical renewal in the archdiocese. While it would be an exaggeration to claim that John Glennon was a "liturgist," it is fair to commend him for allowing those interested in the nascent liturgical apostolate, as encouraged by Pope St. Pius X (1903—1914) and later by Pope Pius XII (1939—1958) to work freely. Especially were Catholics of German background who lived on the farms and in small towns interested in the liturgical revival, which can be traced to the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows in Starkenberg. Carried on by the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood in O'Fallon, their chaplain, later pastor of Holy Cross, Monsignor Martin Hellreigel, would gain international respect for being in the forefront of the renewal in the Church's worship that would later blossom at the Second Vatican Council.

Since the time of the Master, outreach and service to the poor, sick and marginalized has been an imperative, and during the Glennon years this aspect of the Church's mission grew as well. Two colorful priests drew special attention to the needs of the poor, Father Peter Dunne and Father Tim Dempsey. The former took care of "street children," while the latter established residences for the homeless. It was Father John J. Butler who, with the archbishop's patronage, brought professional organization to the lengthy litany of services offered by the archdiocese in its orphanages, employment agencies, homeless shelters, and residences for the aged and infirm, giving them all some direction and structure by bringing them under the umbrella of the Catholic Charities network.

If Jesus had any favorites, it certainly was the sick, and thus has His Church always shown special compassion for them over two millennia. The archdiocese became a center for Catholic health care during the more than four decades of Glennon's pastorate. With women religious again in the lead, St. John's Hospital (Mercy Sisters) opened in 1912 not far from the Cathedral, St. Mary's (Sisters of St. Mary) started in 1922 just west of city limits in Richmond Heights, and De Paul (Daughters of Charity) welcomed patients in 1930 on North Kingshighway. These hospitals also offered acclaimed schools for the training of nurses.

Saint Louis University School of Medicine's already prestigious reputation was enhanced when its dean, the Reverend Alphonse Schwitalla, SJ, was elected president of the Catholic Hospital Association in 1928, accenting the archdiocese's impact on the Church's healing mission.

Because it hosted the first university west of the Mississippi, Saint Louis University, and a major theologate for future priests, Kenrick Seminary, the archdiocese had long been looked to as a pioneer in education. In fact, in 1904, a year after Glennon's installation, the National Catholic Education Association was founded in St. Louis. The heart of the educational structure of the archdiocese was its parochial school system. To provide some support and standardization to these elementary schools, Archbishop Glennon appointed Father Aloysius V. Garthoeffner as the first superintendent of schools for the archdiocese. Father Garthoeffner did not stop with primary education, though, but decided that the Church had to begin sponsorship of high schools. Thus, in 1910, Kenrick Center for Boys opened at Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, as well as Rosati Center for Girls at St. Teresa on the north side, and Kain Center for Girls at St. Francis de Sales on the south side. Such endeavors could never have succeeded without the

investment of men and women religious, with the Brothers of the Society of Mary, for instance, staffing the high school for boys, and the Sisters of St. Joseph and the School Sisters of Notre Dame, the two for girls. The establishment of new high schools would continue throughout the next three decades of Glennon's leadership.

Nor did Catholic schooling stop at senior year of high school. Three institutions, all conducted by women religious, and all beginning as extensions of Saint Louis University, came on the scene in 1924: Webster College, under the Loretto Sisters; Fontbonne, conducted by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, and Maryville, administered by the Religious of the Sacred Heart.

Christian education is more expansive than schools, of course. One of the most celebrated figures in the infant field of religious publishing and the apostolate of communications through the press and media, the beloved Father Daniel Lord, SJ, made St. Louis his base, drawing people, especially the young, to the Church through song, socials, retreats, preaching, and pamphlets and booklets.

Yet, St. Louis' evangelical use of the press antedated the successful Father Lord, as Father David Phelan, who died in 1915, had published the controversial *Western Watchman*, and the fiery Arthur Preuss had put out the *Review*, an endeavor that would continue through Glennon's initial years in St. Louis. With the backing of the Knights of Columbus, the Vincentian Fathers, led by Lester Fallon, CM, began the publication of attractive pamphlets clarifying misunderstood doctrines of the Catholic faith. With all of this printing going on, it was surprising that the archdiocese lacked an official newspaper, even though a weekly, the *Catholic Herald*, called St. Louis its home base. In 1940, Glennon remedied this situation by announcing that Father Harry Stitz would begin editing the *St. Louis Register*, the precursor of today's *Review*.

Regrettably, while the Archdiocese of St. Louis was in the lead on movements such as education, charity, rural life, the liturgy and parish vitality, its attention to the needs of black Catholics was far from laudable, a failure that would, thankfully, later be corrected. Even without the archbishop's encouragement, though, a number of priests, sisters, and committed laity did serve this neglected portion of Christ's flock. Among these would be Father William Markoe, SJ, who, aided by St. Katharine Drexel's Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and the Divine Word Fathers, opened St. Nicholas Parish east of the university for the care of blacks. Later, with the help of his brother, Father John Markoe, St. Elizabeth's Parish opened at Cook and Taylor, also to welcome black Catholics. In 1937, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, with the help of Father Patrick J. Molloy, courageously opened a high school, St. Joseph, for black youth, and two years before Glennon's death, a brave and prophetic Jesuit, Father Claude Heithaus, in sermons and an article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, called Saint Louis University to task for its refusal to admit black students, a move one historian of Catholic higher education in America considers the beginning of the end of racial segregation in Catholic education.

Since the beginning, St. Louis has been called a "cradle" for religious orders, and such a climate of welcome continued throughout Glennon's 43-year reign. The older religious orders, such as the Religious of the Sacred Heart, expanded by opening Villa Duchesne in 1929. Likewise did the Jesuits branch out with the opening of Saint Louis University High School, the White House Retreat, and Father Lord's ministry among youth through the Sodality

movement, and the Visitandines furthered their educational apostolate with a high school for girls north of Forest Park. The Marianists were among the first to move west with the building of Chaminade on what is now Lindbergh Boulevard, while taking on as well a commitment to the education of boys at both South Side Catholic and McBride. By 1930, the Archdiocese of St. Louis could boast of the presence of 16 religious orders of men and 19 of women.

As Glennon approached his 80th birthday in 1942, he had been Archbishop of St. Louis nearly half his life. In 1933, he had received his first auxiliary bishop, the native born Christian Winkelmann, who was pastor of St. Francis de Sales Parish. Seven years later, Monsignor George J. Donnelly succeeded Winkelmann as auxiliary. The venerable Glennon had led his archdiocese through the First World War, the Depression, and, in his ninth decade, through the Second World War. On Christmas Eve, 1945, Pope Pius XII universalized the acclaim St. Louis had for its archbishop by naming John Joseph Glennon a cardinal. As St. Louisans recall to this day, their beloved cardinal never returned, for he died at the presidential palace in Dublin, where he had been triumphantly welcomed as he was on his way back home from Rome with the Red Hat.

St. Louis, though, has his body and his cardinal's hat in his splendid Cathedral. More importantly, it has his spirit in strong parishes, excellent Catholic education, liturgical vitality, charitable outreach, and hearty country Catholic family life. He was eulogized mostly for his achievements in building and oratory. Yet he would leave his successor a Church of "living stones" serving a God whose Word was being preached in a brilliant variety of ways.