

Souvenir

Consecration of

St. Mary's Monastery Church

Dunkirk, New York



May sixteenth, nineteen hundred thirty-five

Consecration of
St. Mary's Monastery Church

May 16, 1935

*In grateful dedication to our Beloved Bishop
His Excellency William Turner, D. D.*

V. Rev. Casper Conley, C. P., Rector
Rev. Aidan English, C. P., Pastor
Rev. Conell Hopkins, C. P.
Rev. Justinian McLaughlin, C. P.

Ceremony of Consecration

His Excellency William Turner, D. D.
Celebrant

Rev. Fr. Austin, C. P.
Deacon

Rev. Fr. Paschal, C. P.
Sub-Deacon

Right Rev. Edmund Britt, Chancellor
Master of Ceremonies

St. Mary's

IF it is a matter of concern to those interested in any institution to preserve the story of its origins and of its development, this concern assumes a character of especial love when the institution in question is a religious one. Here we have something more than merely human memories; we have some account, however partial, of the workings of Divine grace among men. The establishment and progress of the Church of God in any place is thus a source of inspiration to the devout Christian, who sees in it a continuation of that work of the sanctification of souls which proceeds through the ages, with perennial fruitfulness, from the Cross of Christ.

Even before the time of our Saviour, it was the first thought of the holy men of the Old Law, in the course of those wanderings through which Divine Providence led them, to erect altars or tabernacles for the worship of God. The Patriarch Abraham is an outstanding example of this; and the Sacred Liturgy recalls particularly the action of Jacob who, after beholding his vision of angels ascending and descending between earth and heaven, consecrated an altar as a remembrance of this sacred place in which the Lord had manifested His presence.

The Apostles and their successors who spread the Faith of Christ throughout the world and who, in consequence, effected the multiplying of churches and altars for the Divine worship, soon brought about the substantial fulfillment of the ancient prophecy of Malachy: "From the rising of the sun even to the going down My Name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My Name a clean oblation" (Malachy i. 10, 11). This zeal on the part of the ministers of Christ has always found its correspondence on the part of the faithful laity who, going to strange lands and distant settlements, have always been anxious to make provision for the establishment of the work and worship of religion. We find this manifested in the history of this country, from the coming of Columbus down to our own day. A conspicuous example is that of the colonists who came to Maryland and whose zeal for the True Faith remains their greatest glory.

The early history of the Church in this region of Western New York is no less bright. The exploring expeditions of La Salle (1667-1687) and of the other great French pioneers were made up chiefly, if not entirely, of Catholics, and they were accompanied by devoted missionary priests some of whom were to win the martyr's crown and to be raised to the honors of the altar. The Hon. Obed Edson in his

"Sketch of the Early History of Chautauqua County" gives some account of the labors of these priests among the Indians and Frenchmen in this section. Fr. Hennepin, the Franciscan, had accompanied LaSalle himself, while among the names of the Jesuit missionaries occurs the illustrious one of St. Jean de Brebeuf. While the work of these men did not effect a permanent establishment of the Church in this section, it cannot be doubted that their prayers and sacrifices had much to do with the growth which later years were to witness. These zealous priests offered the Holy Sacrifice in many places throughout New York, and that fact alone would have ensured God's blessing upon the territory.

Whether or not the locality now known as Dunkirk was one of the places so favored can never be known. The ascertained history of the Church in this section begins with the coming of the first Irish settlers in the first half of the nineteenth century. Few in numbers and poor in worldly goods, they brought the Catholic Faith with them, and thus they became the nucleus of this parish which we love.

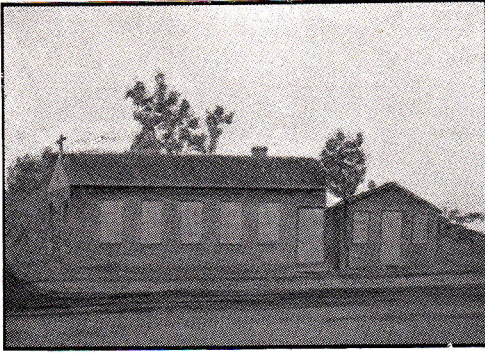
When the Right Reverend John Timon, C. M., who had been consecrated as the first Bishop of Buffalo in October, 1847, came to Dunkirk in the following year, he found the handful of Catholics so poor as to be unable to provide him with a suitable place in which to celebrate Holy Mass, and he was constrained to go to Fredonia for that purpose. However, a beginning had been made, and the zealous Bishop gave himself no rest until he should be able to make permanent provision for his little flock in Dunkirk.

During the next few years the Reverend Thomas McEvoy and other priests attended the Catholic population here, holding Divine service in the home of William O'Neil on Front Street. In 1850, a plot of ground on West Front Street was given to the Bishop by the Devereaux family, but for some reason this location was not found convenient for the proposed chapel. Early in the following year another strip of land was acquired by the Bishop; this was on Second Street, between Robin and Plover Streets. Two frame structures already stood on the premises; one of these was adapted for the chapel, and the other served as the residence of the newly appointed Pastor, the Reverend W. Lennon. This represented the definite establishment of what was to be St. Mary's parish.

An old resident later described this first Catholic Church in Dunkirk as "a long frame building . . . a low squatty affair with a hip roof shingled, the side posts being about 12 or 14 feet high, lined up on the outside with clapboards, the inside, sides, and ceiling being plastered." Yet this poor structure was dear to those who worshipped



INTERIOR VIEW

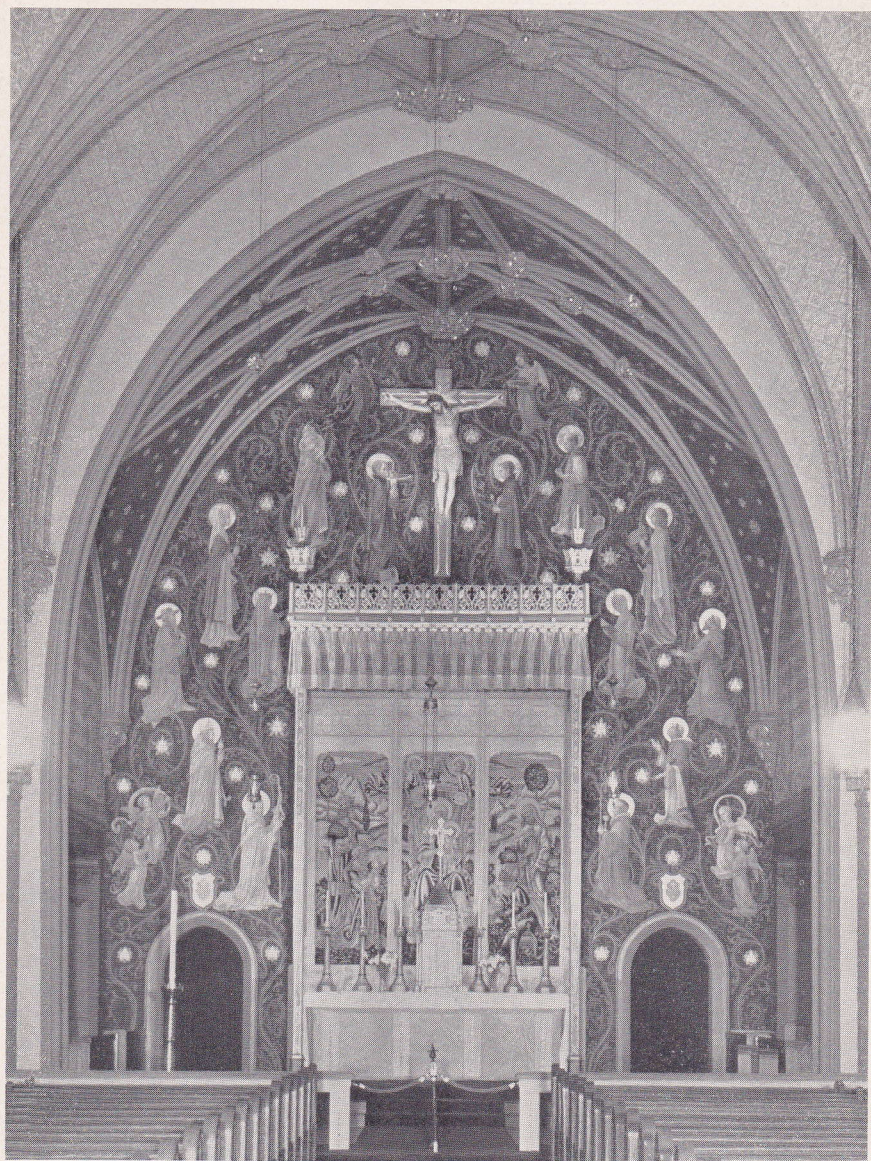


God within its walls and who found there consolation and grace. When the Bishop again visited Dunkirk that same year he expressed his joy at the condition of affairs and asked God's blessing on the mission.

In the meantime the coming of the Erie Railroad to Dunkirk brought a large increase in the Catholic population. The little chapel was no longer large enough, and the Reverend Peter Colgan, who had succeeded Father Lennon after a few months, found it necessary to plan for a more convenient location and a larger church. On July 23, 1852, he purchased the present site on Washington Avenue. The ground was at once cleared and work on the foundations of the new church was begun. The laying of the corner stone in the following year was made the occasion of an enthusiastic demonstration on the part of the parishioners; whose number at that time is indicated by a subscription list containing more than four hundred and forty names. The solemn ceremony was performed by the Vicar General of the diocese, the Very Reverend Peter Bede.

Work on the new church proceeded so rapidly that Father Colgan was able to celebrate Holy Mass in it for the first time on the Feast of St. Patrick, 1854, and to have the edifice blessed on November 12th of the same year. This first dedication of St. Mary's was performed by the Right Reverend Joshua Young, Bishop of Erie, who, incidentally, was to celebrate the same sacred offices just five years later for St. Paul's, the "Monastery Church" of the Passionist Fathers in Pittsburgh. Bishop Young was assisted by a large number of the clergy, and his eloquent sermon on the occasion made a deep impression on the many Protestants who attended as well as on the parishioners.

April 20, 1860 is another outstanding date in the history of this parish, for on that day the Passionist Fathers came to assume charge. Bishop Timon had been anxious for several years to secure the cooperation of the Passionists for the work of his diocese, but their limited numbers had forced them to delay in complying with his request. Their establishment in Dunkirk represented the second foundation of the Congregation in this country. While the people of the parish took reluctant leave of their devoted and able Pastor, Father Colgan, who was deservedly promoted to the Cathedral in Buffalo,



MAIN ALTAR

they prepared a truly royal welcome for the Religious who were coming among them, and with who they were to maintain such happy relations of affection and hearty cooperation throughout all the ensuing years.

The new Pastor was Father Albinus Magno, C. P. This gifted man, who, like several of his successors in St. Mary's, was later to become Provincial in his Congregation, soon endeared himself to the people of Dunkirk. With the assistance of Frs. John Baptist Baudenelli and Andrew McGurgan, he was able to effect many improvements in the church and parish. One of his first acts was to improve the school. For a time, classes were held in the church basement under the able direction of Mother Anastasia and of three other Sisters of Saint Joseph. In 1864, a separate building was provided for St. Mary's school which, even in those early days, maintained a standard which could hardly be excelled. Father Albinus had a keen appreciation of the importance of a good parochial school for the maintenance of vital Catholicism, and he devoted some of his best efforts to the welfare of the school.

During Father Albinus's time, the church tower was completed, and the spire built. In 1867, the tower clock was installed; this was to be known for long afterwards as "the Town Clock." Thus, during these years St. Mary's assumed the general exterior appearance which has been so long familiar to the people of Dunkirk.

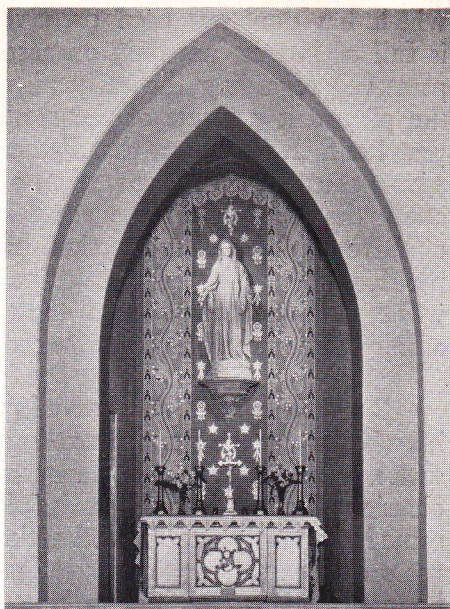
In 1873, however, the interior of the church was practically rebuilt. New flooring and a new roof were provided, with arched ceilings heavily groined, and many other improvements. This work, which resulted in a more secure and beautiful structure, was made possible through the munificence of Hiram J. Miner whose conversion to the Church during the Civil War period made a profound impression on the townspeople.

It was considered appropriate, when the work of remodelling and redecorating had been completed, to have the church rededicated, and this ceremony was performed on November 30, 1873, by the Right Reverend Stephen Vincent Ryan, Bishop of Buffalo, who preached an inspiring sermon on the text: "And when the masons laid the foundations of the Temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their ornaments with trumpets . . . to praise the Lord" (I Esdras, III, 10).

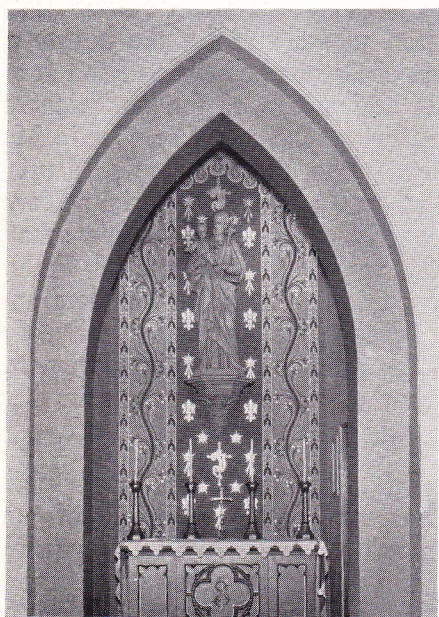
Meanwhile, Father Albinus had been succeeded by his assistant, Fr. John Baptist who was to devote, in all, seventeen years of his priestly ministry to the spiritual welfare of the people of this parish. Father Guido succeeded him in his first term as Pastor of St. Mary's, and it was during Father Guido's administration that Columbus Hall,

as the new school building was called, was erected. During the next years, preceding the Golden Jubilee, the Pastors were: Fathers Martin Meagher, Basil Keating, Alphonsus Rossiter, Stephen Kealy (later the beloved Provincial), Felix Ward, who was always devoted to St. Mary's and who paid the parish and people a noble tribute in his well known work "The Passionists"; Albert Phelan, and Mark Moeslin, whose apostolic zeal still sustains him in his devoted labors for the negroes of North Carolina.

The Golden Jubilee of the parish was observed on November 13, 1904. It was preceded by a very successful mission conducted by Fathers Valentine and Alexis. After the closing exercises of the men's mission they preceded, 1500 strong, to meet the Bishop of the



Shrine of Blessed Virgin Mary



St. Josephs' Shrine

Diocese, the Right Reverend Charles H. Colton, who was arriving for the Jubilee. Mgr. Baker was the preacher at the Pontifical Mass on the following day which was a truly joyful one for the entire parish. Father Mark had been preparing for the occasion by an extraordinary effort to bring home to the people the significance of this milestone in the history of their parish and church, and their renewed devotion repaid all his labors.

The Jubilee Year, 1904, was commemorated by the issuance by Father Mark of a monthly bulletin, "St. Mary's Record." This publication,

which has doubtless been preserved by many of the parishioners, is full of interest not only on account of the abundant data it has preserved regarding the early history of the parish, but because of the picture it presents of the work being done during the Jubilee year itself. It is evident that Father Mark's enlightened zeal for the advancement of every department of parish activity, his loyal efforts to apply the teaching of the great Encyclicals of Leo XIII, and his effective methods of instruction, had much to do with making this parish a model of vital and intelligent Catholic life. Father Mark, too, was especially concerned with the work of the school, and during his administration the building was considerably enlarged and renovated.

But there were other devoted priests who had done much for St. Mary's during the years preceding the Jubilee. Among them were such men as Father Joseph Flanagan, C. P., whose death in 1881 was an occasion of grief to all the parish; Father Casimir Taylor, C. P., who came here shortly after his ordination in 1885 and remained for several years doing incalculable good; Father Paul Nussbaum, C. P., later honored by the Holy See in being appointed as the first Bishop of Corpus Christi, Texas, and who now rules the Diocese of Marquette; and others.

During the years following the Jubilee celebration, the work of the parish was carried forward by a succession of devoted parish priests. The pastors who succeeded Father Mark were: Father Linus Monahan, now Provincial Consultor, whose zeal for the beauty of God's House and for the promotion of Catholic education has left an indelible impression on the hearts and minds of the parishioners; Fathers Basil Malone, Chrysostom Smith, Clement Lee, Oswin McGibbon, Herbert McDevitt, Coleman Byrne, Aloysius Boyle, Maurice Kanzlieter, Hilarion O'Rourke. Among the notable material achievements of this period must be mentioned the erection of the new school and hall, carried through in 1932 under the guidance of Father Thomas with the generous cooperation of the parishioners and especially of the members of St. Mary's Lyceum, and, finally, the redecoration of the church during the last year. These improvements have done much towards increasing the pride of the people in their parish buildings, and in renewing their enthusiasm for its work.

But, after all, the real history of the Catholic Church in any place does not consist in recounting names and dates and details of constructions. The generosity and devotion which have made possible the building of churches, schools, and orphanages, are but the result of that deeper life of the soul which it is the chief purpose of all these things to foster and enkindle. And who can calculate the fruits of

grace? If St. Mary's parish has shown such progress in all its material manifestations, may we not rightly assume that its supernatural accomplishments have been correspondingly glorious? And, indeed, when we consider the countless Sacraments which have been administered throughout these years within St. Mary's walls, the blessings brought down upon the parish through the Holy Mass, and the souls who have been won for God through the constant preaching of the Doctrine of Christ and through the lives and example of so many faithful Christians, priests and laity, we have every reason for devout gratitude, and for a lively hope for an everlasting reunion with our dear ones who have gone home before us.

One of the surest signs of spiritual vitality in any parish is the number of vocations to the sanctuary and the cloister which it contributes to the Church. St. Mary's record in this respect is very high. Naturally, the Passionist Congregation has benefitted by a large proportion of these vocations. Among her distinguished sons from this parish we find such names as those of Fathers Robert McNamara, Raphael Toomey, Basil Malone, Agatho Clifford, Brendan Cunneen, and Fidelis Cummings, all of whom have gone to God; and, among the living, Fathers Denis and Alban Callagee, William Harding, Edward Goggin, and William Cavanaugh. During the past few years, the Apostolic career of Father Clement Seybold was ended with his holy death in the Chinese mission field, and Fathers Mark Seybold, Wilfrid Morrissey, and Bartholomew Dean, began their work in the Passionist priesthood; while several other young men from the parish are preparing for the same sublime mission. Others from among St. Mary's sons, such as Fathers Robert Galbraith and Leo Reddy, are enrolled among the diocesan clergy, and others, again, have dedicated their lives to the work of different Religious Orders. The various Sisterhoods, too, have had their ranks increased by the reception of many of St. Mary's finest daughters, and some of these devout women have died in the odor of sanctity.

St. Mary's has, besides, the distinction of being the mother church of a large number of other parishes. In the early days it included a very considerable territory within its borders, and its numerous missions became flourishing churches in their turn. Thus the early records of this parish contain frequent references to the stations at Jamestown, Mayville, Sinclairville, Sherman, Cassadaga, French Creek, Brocton, Westfield, Stockton, Fredonia, Forestville, Sheridan, Silver Creek, Angola, Irving, North Evans, Gowanda, Cattaraugus, and Dayton. This explains why St. Mary's church has long been regarded as a sanctuary and place of pilgrimage by the people of the surrounding country.

It is but fitting that the church building which has been so dear to the Catholic people of Dunkirk, which has been the scene of the happiest and most solemn moments in the lives of so many of them, and which has been sanctified throughout all these years by the countless graces flowing within its walls, should receive at last the solemn rite of Consecration by which it passes, finally and irrevocably, into the Service of God. During the Jubilee Year of 1904, Father Mark had expressed the desire that the church might soon be consecrated, but the requirements of the Liturgy in this matter are very exacting, and his wish had to be delayed. The changes affected during the last year have at length made the Consecration possible.

As God is never outdone in generosity, the perpetual gift to His Divine Majesty which this ceremony represents, will mean for the church and for the people of the parish an increase and renewal of grace. The rites and prayers of this solemn occasion cannot be in vain; they are something more than a crown of love and honor on the prayers and sacrifices of those who have lived and labored in St. Mary's parish; they will be an inspiration and an incentive to priests and people to rededicate themselves to the struggle for that Heavenly Kingdom of which the church we see is the type and symbol.

The Consecration, then, is not a conclusion, it is something more than a climax, in the history of this church: it represents a new beginning in the spiritual life of this congregation. For we, too, constitute a temple; we are, in the words of St. Peter, "living stones" which must be built up and formed for Eternal Life. This temple is never finished while the world lasts. In the language of St. Augustine, "Stones are being hewn out of the mountains by the hands of them that preach the truth, and being cut square, that they may be fitted into the everlasting walls. Many stones are still in the hands of the workman, and they must not fall out of his hands if they would be suitable for the masonry of the temple . . . whose Foundation is Christ."

It is our prayer, then, that this happy day on which our church is consecrated, will mean even more to our people than those former dedications did to their fathers. For today God says to us: "Now I have chosen and sanctified this place that My Name may be there forever, and My Eyes and My Heart shall be there perpetually" (3 Kings, IX, 3). Let us love this sacred temple which has been prepared for this happy consummation through the labors of so many years, and let us see in it the symbol of our Salvation: "I rejoiced when they said to me: we shall go into the house of the Lord (Ps. 121).