

Coeur d'Alene church recognizes a century of celebrating mass

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By NICK ROTUNNO/Staff writer | 6 comments



The Most Rev. Michael Driscoll, Bishop of Boise, delivers a homily during a Sunday mass at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Coeur d'Alene. The Catholic church celebrated the 100th anniversary of its inaugural service. --NICK ROTUNNO/Press

COEUR d'ALENE - For more than a century, the colorful stained glass windows of St. Thomas the Apostle Church have stood watch over weddings, baptisms, confirmations and Holy Communions.

Tricia Vieth and her husband, Nick, were married at St. Thomas in the summer of 2009. Their son, Audun, now 4 1/2 months old, was baptized there.

"I just feel fortunate that we have such a beautiful facility," Tricia said. "We're downtown, so it's a diverse parish, but welcoming to all."

The Vieth family, alongside hundreds of fellow parishioners, attended the 10 a.m. service on Sunday. Warm sunlight glowed behind the stained glass, and every pew was filled.

On March 5, 1911, the newly-built St. Thomas celebrated its first mass. One hundred years later, the Catholic church still stands on the corner of Ninth and Indiana, and the Rev. Michael Driscoll, Bishop of Boise, traveled to Coeur d'Alene to commemorate the anniversary.

"It's one of the most beautiful churches in our diocese," Driscoll said to the congregation, "and it's a delight to be able to celebrate with you this morning."

His homily referenced the heroes and heroines of both testaments. Moses, David and Abraham were flawed humans, he said, but they all answered God's call.

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"Peter was as stubborn as a rock. Paul was a religious fanatic. And Lazarus ... Lazarus was dead," Driscoll said, drawing a laugh from the crowd.

"Augustine was a playboy, who fathered a child out of wedlock, and Joan of Arc was viewed as a militant cross-dresser, prone to hearing voices."

But their shortcomings made no difference, he said, and in the end, "They truly changed the world. They changed the world for the better."

Beyond its beauty and grandeur, St. Thomas reflects the presence of God in the community, Driscoll said. He ended the homily with a request.

"So today, as we celebrate the birthday of St. Thomas Church, as we come to celebrate the call that each of us has, let us ask God to truly be with us, so that our response every day can be a resounding 'Yes.'"

Parishioner Mike Zaggar of Hayden also attended Sunday's mass. He spoke with Driscoll face-to-face.

"First time I had met the bishop, and he seemed to be a very humble, common person," Zaggar said. "I think (the homily) was very good. I think it was right on."

Attending a 100-year-old church, he added, a building with so much history within its walls, makes him feel proud.

"That's the major thing about this church, the old-world craftsmanship," Zaggar said.

Unlike newer, more modern churches, St. Thomas - completed on May 1, 1910 - retains a medieval quality. The building is reminiscent of European cathedrals, with high exterior walls, archways and a towering cross-capped steeple.

The stained glass, of course, is very traditional.

"I think it's a beautiful church. The colors in (the glass), you just won't find them again," said Julia Mangan, a parishioner from Coeur d'Alene. "Compared to other churches across town that are new, it does have a different feel to it. I like it. You're always welcome. The ritual is always there. It's comforting."