

**MASS FOR THE CLOSING OF THE BICENTENNIAL JUBILEE
OF THE DIOCESE OF RICHMOND**

THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

January 17, 2021

Genesis 3:9–15, 20 • Acts 1:12–14 • John 19:25–34

I.

The definitive history of the Diocese of Richmond was written by Fr. Gerry Fogarty, a Jesuit priest who was a professor at UVA for decades.

Commonwealth Catholicism traces the story of Catholics in Virginia, from the arrival of the Spanish Jesuit Martyrs in 1570 to the creation of the Diocese of Arlington in northern Virginia in 1974.

This history of the Richmond Diocese was commissioned by Bp. Walter Sullivan, the eleventh bishop of our diocese.

Fr. Fogarty published *Commonwealth Catholicism* in 2001.

At that time,
I was in the seminary,
where one of the requirements was a course in American Church history.

Some classmates and I were able to arrange an independent-study with Fr. Fogarty based on his book,
and I've stayed in touch with him through the years.

Commonwealth Catholicism was the result of ten years of research and work.

That's evident when you look at the endnotes and bibliography.

Fr. Fogarty scoured the archives of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Diocese of Richmond, and the Vatican.

He also made use of parish histories from throughout the diocese.

And then he had to weave the material together in a coherent narrative.

It was an impressive feat, and the book is well worth reading.

The Diocese of Richmond is fortunate to have that history.

I've read *Commonwealth Catholicism* several times,
and, impressed at its scope and depth,
and I find myself posing a philosophical question:

How much about the story of the Catholic Church in VA don't we know?

How much have we misunderstood?

How much has been forgotten, lost to history?

After all, any historical account must be based on sources.

Inevitably, information gets lost.

And what about all of those unheralded Catholics,
who made sacrifices, and who gave witness to their faith,
but about whom we have no information?

I console myself with the following thought:
What has been lost to history is known to God.

II.

Today concludes a historic celebration:
the bicentennial jubilee of our diocese.

The Richmond Diocese is among the seventh oldest dioceses in the United States.

Many things have happened over the course of 200 years,
and many things have happened during the jubilee year itself:
the pandemic, along with civil unrest last summer,
and the violence at the United States Capitol in Washington on January 6.

These events are intertwined with the story of the Church;
Catholics seek to live out their faith in the rough and tumble of real life,
striving to guide the history of the world according to the values of our faith.

History will continue, and the Church will persevere amid those events,
always trying to do God's work.

For the conclusion of the diocesan bicentennial,
Bp. Knestout has asked that all parishes use the readings and prayers
for the Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church.

That's a fitting choice because Mary represents all of us
as the foremost member of the Church.

Mary is both the Mother of God and the Mother of the Church,
which is the Body of her Son in history.

Mary embodies the whole Church.

The Church, like her,
is both a Virgin dedicated to God
and a Mother who brings forth new life.

In the First Reading, Eve foreshadows Mary.

She was called "Eve"
"because she became the mother of all the living."

Eve sinned, as did Adam.

Mary, who did not sin, and who cooperated generously with God,
became the Mother the of the Savior,
and in that way, the Mother of those who are saved by him.

God announces Mary's role in the Book of Genesis,
when he declares to the serpent:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
He will strike at your head,
while you strike at his heel.”

Mary’s commitment and cooperation with God lasted through her whole life.

It spanned from the conception of Jesus at the Annunciation,
to her sharing in Jesus’ passion and death at the foot of the Cross.

The Gospel tells us that there, at the foot of the Cross,
Mary became the Mother of believers:

“Woman, behold, your son. ...
Behold, your mother.”

Mary helped Jesus, whose passion, death, and resurrection
has given eternal life to believers.

So, she is the Mother of believers.

III.

On the Church’s voyage to heaven, through history,
Mary shines as *Stella maris*: the Star of the Sea.

Her example inspires us to live supremely for God,
and her intercession from heaven helps us to move forward.

Her life embodies the Church’s perfection,
which will be the gathering of believers within the Trinity.

The history of the Diocese of Richmond continues with our own lives,
because it is the story—the chronicle—of believers here in this place.

What we think, say, and do matters to God,
even if we don’t see the results.

Through triumphs and failures,
the Lord guides the world according to his plan.

Nothing is lost to Almighty God,
and each of us is already represented before him by the Most Blessed Virgin Mary,
the Mother of the Church,
who helps us on our way.