

The following Homily was given by Archbishop John R. Roach on the occasion of the Garry-Ryan, Hickey-Roach Homecoming at St. Patrick on 1 July 1979.

I am delighted to celebrate with you today our common heritage and I congratulate those who have dreamt up this whole thing, who worked at it, and made it happen. A lot of us are very grateful to you for the enormous amount of work which had to go into the preparation of this event.

There is a new way of doing prayer, something we call imaging. It really isn't all that new because the Stations of the Cross are an example of imaging. It is just trying to place yourself historically at the moment in Scripture or in history, let your imagination wander and try to reconstruct the events, the moments, which in prayer we are praying or contemplating, or reflecting upon, or just dreaming or trying to recall. That is what I have tried to do as I thought about today.

What was life like for those who went before us, many of whose graves are in this cemetery of St. Patrick's or St. Catherine's? What was their life like and what was the glue that held the people together? What was their common strength? What was their common bond? What made life for them really worth passing on one generation to another generation? No one of us in this church can do that adequately because we weren't there; but most of us in this church are the inheritors of the bloodlines which we celebrate today. Now I recognize that when I say that not everyone in this Church comes from the four families celebrating our common heritage. Some of the Irish got kind of foolish and married other nationalities. But we are celebrating essentially our Irish Catholic Tradition, the Faith. We are celebrating that tradition of four families from whose bloodlines you and I come.

When the Irish came to St. Patrick, Cedar Lake, as they came to many, many, small, little villages throughout this state and across the country, they brought with them some very precious kinds of traditions. They were lovers of song, they were lovers of good storytelling, and in some cases, they even had some devotion to work, though that was rare. But they did have a devotion to Church and throughout this country you have small pockets of Irish families, who for whatever reason, left the country they loved very dearly – that country which had fallen upon very bad days – and they came to a new country, a new land. They came with hope, but with great fear. That is very clear in the early Irish literature of this country. It is clear in the departing songs as the Irish left Ireland. But they came with a bond of Faith and so with them came generally, Irish priests and they formed little Faith communities like this one. They worked together, they celebrated together, they prayed together, they worshipped their God together, and they recognized that if they were going to really succeed, if they were going to make real the dreams they had, then they were going to have to form themselves around some kind of common element, and that element generally was the Church.

So, when you and I celebrate our family heritage today, we celebrate also, I suggest, the common thanks we owe to the Church, which was a home to our forefathers. This is where they came on Sundays to worship, to rejoice, to share one another's joys and sorrows of the week. This is where they came to bury the dead, and this is where they came to baptize and that whole cycle of birth-death, living and dying was always celebrated and always centered around the Church.

People today are trying very hard to establish their roots. Alex Haley's book did an enormous amount for the Blacks of this country. I have read, within the past couple of weeks, a small book published locally in Minneapolis by an Indian, who is really in a sense trying to do what Haley did for the Black Tradition, trying to re-establish an identity. This is a part of what you and I are doing today. We are going back to our roots. We are going back to the things that kept these families growing. We are proud to bear the names of our forebears, and we are proud of the tradition of which we are a part. A part of those roots is the love of Jesus Christ. The hope of the Spirit of God sustained these people in the very difficult years they had.

You and I know we came from simple, but God-fearing, God-loving people, and that is a very great blessing. It is that which we celebrate today and that for which I give thanks. I thank God for the strength which came down from above. You and I have much to be grateful for and we have much to celebrate. We celebrate today our common heritage. We celebrate today our common belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, true to His people today. He sustained them as He sustains us. We celebrate and give thanks to that Church so central a part of the lives of the families you and I came from.

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