

New altar dedicated at St. Joseph's Church on Capitol Hill

BY MARK ZIMMERMANN

Catholic Standard

St. Joseph's Church, a Capitol Hill landmark since the late 1800s, witnessed its own history on May 23, as Archbishop Donald Wuerl blessed and dedicated a gleaming new marble altar there, and celebrated the first Eucharist on that altar.

"This altar takes on unique power to represent Christ in this community," he said during his homily. "Today as we consecrate this altar, we're reminded that the witness to the resurrection of Christ goes on in the celebration of every Eucharist. From this day forward, this altar will be a living symbol... a witness of Christ in this community."

Celebrating the Mass of the Ascension of Our Lord, he said the altar serves as a reminder of the transforming power of Christ. "Each of us is asked to stand in the world... and bear witness to the fact that Jesus is risen, and we have new life... You and I are witnesses" of the risen Lord, he said.

FAITH, GENEROSITY

Greeting the people at the Mass, Msgr. Charles Antonicelli, the pastor, thanked them for their faith and generosity. "Through your generosity, we have been able to restore and refurbish this beautiful church," he said.

In the fall of 2007, Archbishop Wuerl dedicated a dramatic new life-sized crucifix behind the altar. St. Joseph's Church also has a new slate roof, new heating and air conditioning sys-

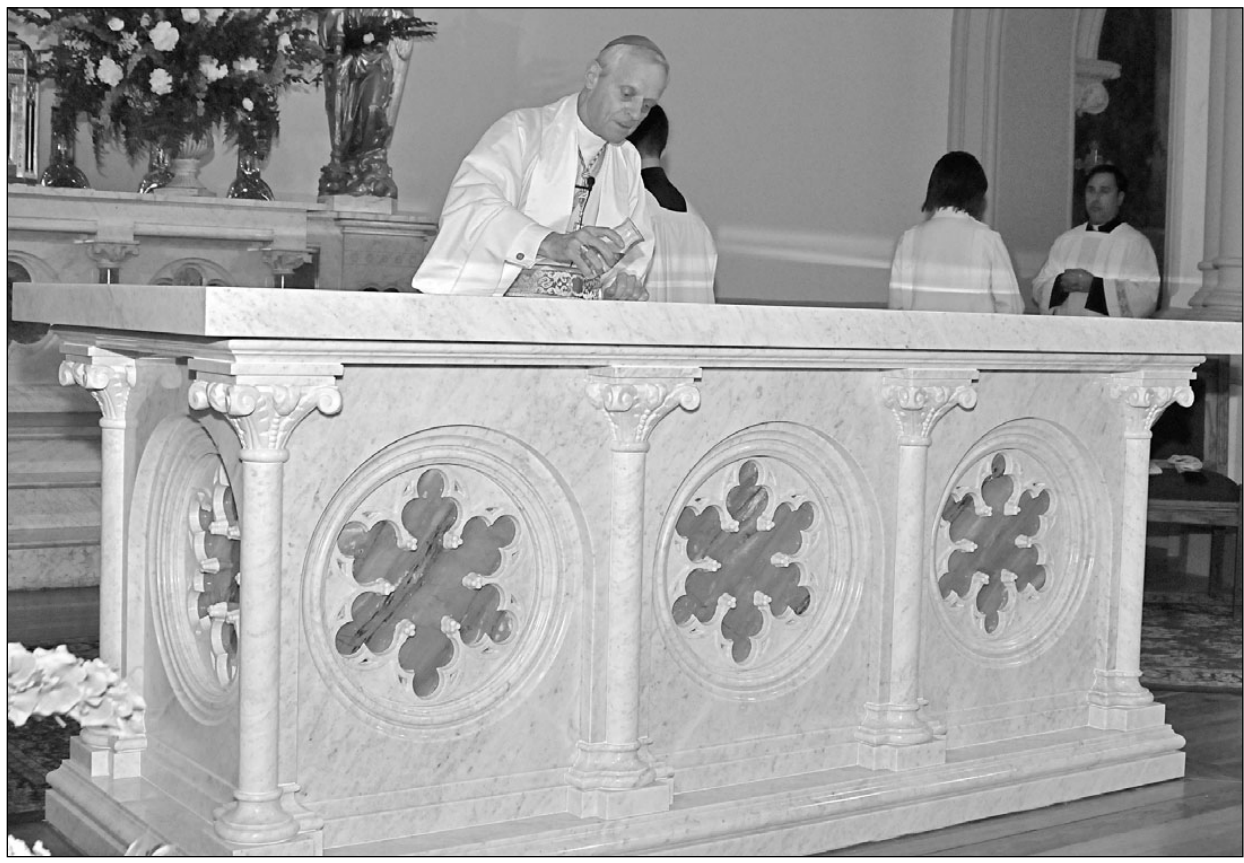
tems, restored murals of Mary and the church's patron saint, St. Joseph, and a vaulted ceiling painted a deep blue color with gold-leaf stars, and the wooden doorways and pews have also been restored.

The new altar includes white carrera marble from Italy, the kind sculpted by Michelangelo, with gold marble in a design by noted church architect and St. Joseph's parishioner James McCrery that complements the old high altar, which remains.

"It just glows in the midst of the church," McCrery said. "...This is now the altar of sacrifice. It has to call attention to itself in order to call attention to the Eucharist."

Funds for the altar were given by the Loyola Foundation in memory of its past executive director and founding member, Albert Gregory McCarthy III, who died last year. McCarthy attended daily Mass at St. Joseph's and was a member of the Legion of Mary there. His son Greg McCarthy IV, now the foundation's executive director, attended the Mass of dedication for the new altar. The Loyola Foundation provides funds for Catholic organizations around the world.

A first class relic of Blessed Jeanne Jugan, the foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor, was placed in the altar during the Mass and sealed by Carlos Moreno, a stone mason with Ruggo Stone, which built the altar in place in two weeks, after it had been fab-



CS PHOTOS BY MICHAEL HOYT

Above, Archbishop Donald Wuerl consecrates with holy oil the new marble altar at St. Joseph's Church on Capitol Hill during a May 23 Mass. During the blessing of the altar, the archbishop prayed that "gathered around this one altar, we draw nearer to Christ." In the photo below, Little Sisters of the Poor process with a relic of Blessed Jeanne Jugan, foundress of the religious community. The relic of Blessed Jeanne Jugan, who will be canonized a saint by Pope Benedict XVI on Oct. 11, was sealed into the altar during the Mass.

ricated in Italy from McCrery's design. Ruggo Stone is noted for its work in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

RELIC INSTALLED

Mother Benedict Armstrong, the superior of the Little Sisters' convent in Washington, carried up the relic, a tiny piece of the future saint's bone, in a procession at the beginning of Mass. She said her religious community was honored that Blessed Jeanne Jugan's relic was placed in the center of the altar top, where the Eucharist will be celebrated at each Mass at the parish. Blessed Jeanne Jugan will be canonized a saint by Pope Benedict XVI on Oct. 11.

In Washington, the Little Sisters carry on her work at the Jeanne Jugan Residence, where they provide loving care for 100 poor, elderly residents.

The site of her relic is fitting, since the sisters have a special devotion to St. Joseph. Msgr. Antonicelli's mother Sarah was cared for by the Little Sisters at their

home in Totowa, N.J., during the last years of her life.

Mother Benedict said Blessed Jeanne Jugan's humility makes her a role model for these times. "The world today needs humility more than anything else," she said.

The ritual for the dedication of the altar was very moving, and included the sprinkling of holy water, as a sign that the altar was about to become a sacred object. "Gathered around this one altar, we draw nearer to Christ," Archbishop Wuerl prayed. Later when the altar was incensed, he said that was "a sign of Christ's enduring presence."

THE LORD'S TABLE

The altar was anointed with chrism, that is also used for baptisms, confirmations, and for the ordination of priests and bishops. The archbishop poured the chrism at the center and four corners of the altar, and spread it with his hands.

Reciting the prayer of the dedication of the altar, Archbishop Wuerl prayed, "Bless this altar built in the



house of the Church, that it may... stand forever as the Lord's table, where your people will find nourishment and strength."

After the Mass, Msgr. Antonicelli praised the beauty of the new altar, saying, "It fits in the space. It seems like it's been there forever."

McCrery, who also designed the new sanctuary of St. Hugh of Grenoble

Church in Greenbelt and is working on St. Mary, Mother of God Church in Washington's Chinatown neighborhood, said he was honored to design the new altar and other restoration work at St. Joseph's. "It's a magnificent building," he said of the church, built in the Victorian gothic revival style. "All I've done is reveal its beauties. They're built in. It's a grand church."

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