

TODAY: 1971

"This is the church . . .
Here's the steeple . . .
Open the doors . . .
. . . and see all the people!"

Yes . . . the people of St. Paul's. And they haven't changed from the people who went before us. They still have a strong love of God . . . of Christ . . . and the church. Because we live in a different time, we express it in a different way. Today, the church has changed . . . and yet it has not changed. The essentials are still there. There is a bond with the past, and yet there is hope and excitement for the future.

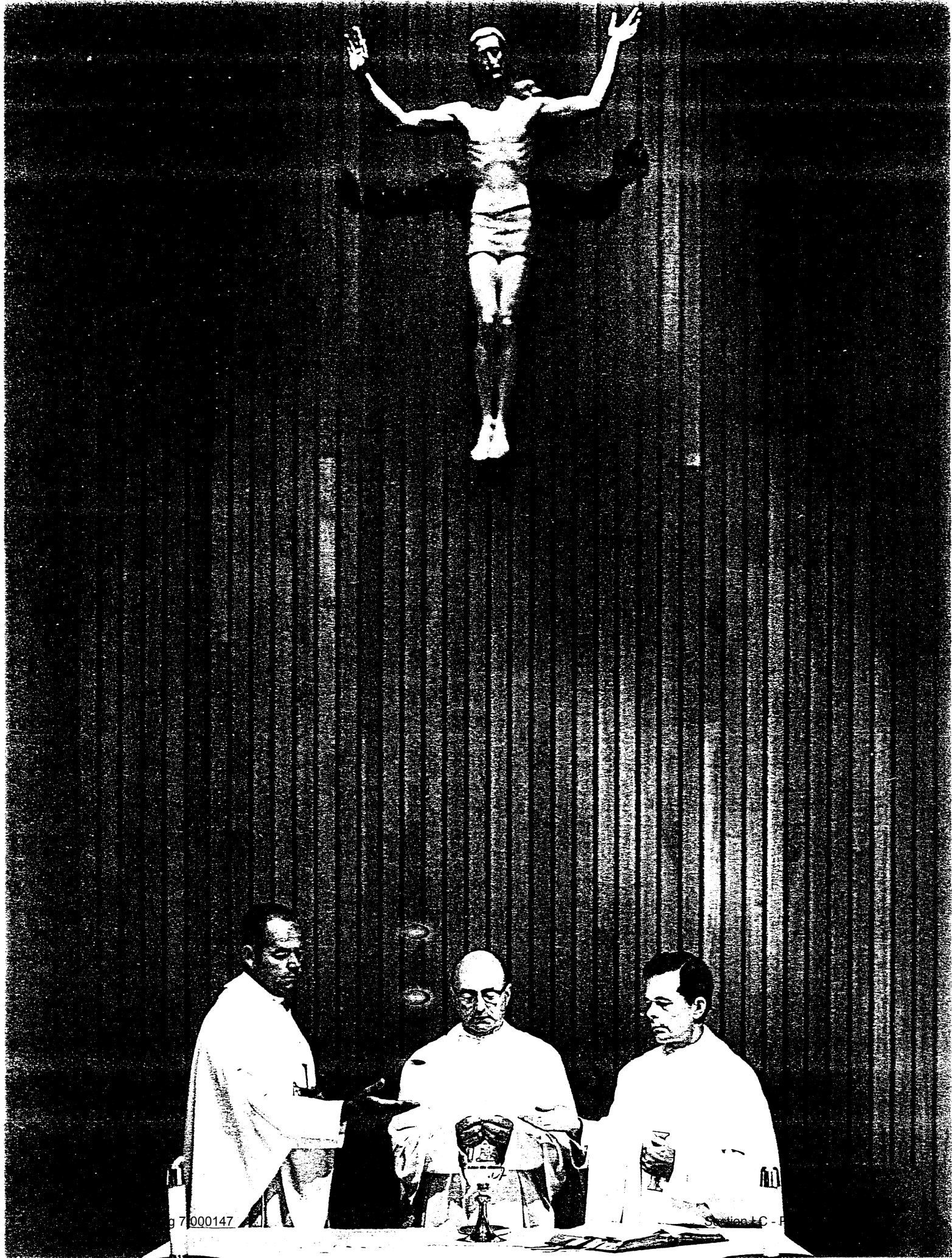
You see it at St. Paul's.

Outwardly, the church looks pretty much the way it did in 1871. Inside . . . the decor, the altar, the new corpus reflects the new church.

The figure of Christ over the altar . . . symbolizing the Crucifixion and the Resurrection . . . the end and the beginning. The Second Vatican Council and the Universal church . . . and St. Paul's.

Yes, the church has changed . . . to reach man as he actually is in his contemporary world.







There are changes in the Liturgy. There is a parish council. We see lay readers . . . community baptism. New forms: a "Sunday" mass on Saturday afternoon at 5 O'Clock. We see C.C.D. classes based on life and living. The old catechism is gone. In its place: slide films and movies, guest speakers, and dialogue . . . not only in C.C.D. classes, but in discussions with youth at home, on the baseball field, outside Brigham's or in front of Donovan's Drug Store.

We see the Sisters doing more with children, and their parents. We see men and women working together — to build a July 4th float, plan a dance, or organize and execute something as momentous as the Centennial celebration. We see softball teams and family picnics; altar boys outings and May processions.

We see the Pastor, the curates and the deacon putting in long hours, saying mass, administering the sacraments; comforting the sick and the dying; counseling the troubled; listening and helping . . . whenever they can.

The church is a visible society organized for a spiritual end, and in that sense, St. Paul's has not changed from yesteryear. If anything, it is more "visible" today than it has ever been. There is a deeper involvement by people. Why? Probably because of the realization that full participation in the whole life of the church is the only way to full membership in the mystical body of Christ.

These few pages illustrate some of the parish activities that are part of today's pattern of church life. They are visible, and they are necessary, because religion must take concrete forms.

But there are also other forms. The Mass and Communion are still the cornerstones of Catholic action. The Liturgy "is the crowning glory of the mystical body of Christ (the church)." And since religion "is a binding of man to God," there is prayer . . . the very substance of Christian life.

We see prayer in all forms.

A young boy . . . hurriedly . . . squeezing God into a "busy" day.

A young father . . . "Dear God, help me to be a good father, a good husband, and a good man."

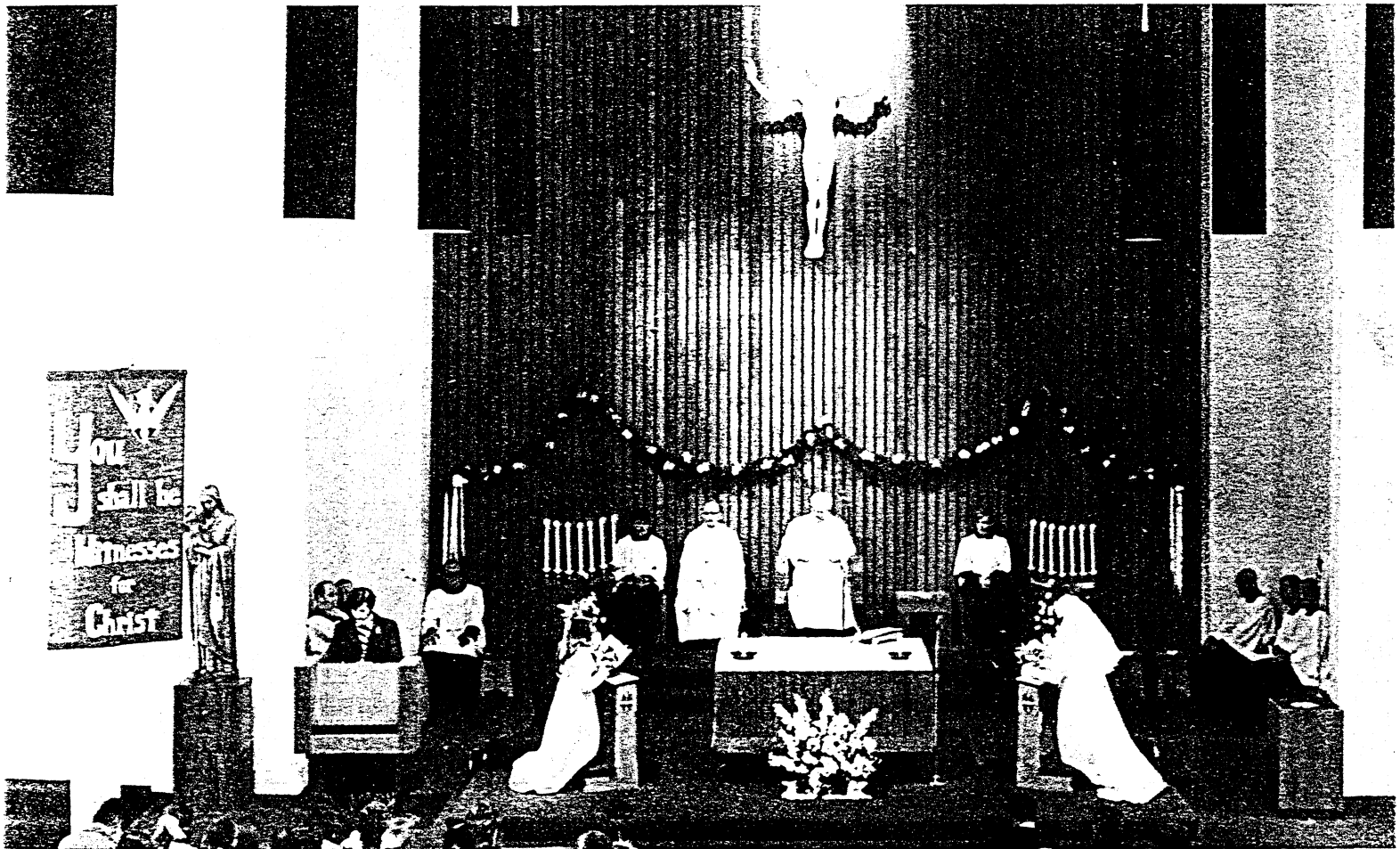
In the confessional — "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned . . ."

Prayer is our link to God. We ask Him to bless us when we are born, when we are baptized, confirmed, married or ordained, and when we face death. Prayer is also an everyday thing; because we realize, as the church banner says so succinctly: "today is the first day of the rest of our lives."

So, today, in St. Paul's, Hingham, the really important things still guide us into our second century. A great church . . . and a strong people . . . and a deep love for Christ.

God has been good to us.











THE FUTURE:

An interview with
Reverend Monsignor John J. Sheehan S.T.L.
August, 1971



Monsignor Sheehan was ordained on December 8, 1937, and has spent most of his priesthood in parish work. He served on the faculty of St. John's Seminary for six years prior to being named Pastor of St. Paul's church on February 25, 1965. In October of 1967, Cardinal Cushing also appointed him Episcopal Vicar for Plymouth County.

Monsignor, there have been a lot of changes in the church, and St. Paul's, the last few years. When you look to the future, it's natural to wonder what will happen five, ten, fifty years from now. Do you see any other changes coming along?

I'm sure that the people who watched the setting up of the cross on the church in 1871 had high hopes for the future; but they couldn't possibly imagine what has taken place in the church over these last one hundred years. As we look to the future, we can speak with the same confidence and security that they had. When it comes to specifically naming what is likely to happen, it's . . . difficult.

Well, there's been a greater involvement, for example, on the part of people. Do you see even more?

Yes. One thing that will happen definitely is a change of mood in the church. For example, when St. Paul's church was built, the people had a great deal of internal courage and security. This is indicated by the size of the church they built . . . far beyond their needs. Today, we have spent time in the parish, and in the whole church, in self-examination. This has prevented us from moving out into the world and accomplishing the great things the church is capable of doing. And I think that, very soon, both at the level of the universal church and the local church, we are going to see an end to that process of self-examination and self-adjustment. We will see a return of the courage and outward-looking frame of mind that generally characterizes the church.

Well, if there will be a self-involvement on the part of people, are there any specific ways they will? For example, we've seen the deacons come to St. Paul's, we've seen lay readers . . . the parish council. Are there any other changes you can see coming?

Yes. There's a great deal of talent in the people of the church. You will see a better use of that talent. Also, a better sense of the possibility of service. It's very interesting, for example, that when the deacon program started, most people thought of the deacon as someone for whom we were doing something. We were giving him a chance to try himself out for size. Gradually, this has reversed. Now we see the deacon as a man who serves the community. He's part of what's going on. The same thing is going to happen in areas like the parish council. There's going to be a much greater conviction that the parish council is not merely an experiment we're trying out. It is a legitimate, on-going part of church life. I think we'll see a great deal more confidence, expertise and acceptance.

What about the work of the parish council? Has it been good?

Yes. We're fortunate here. The makeup of our parish council has been excellent. We have people with considerable experience . . . that they've been able to bring to bear in the council. In the church we're moving from a running of the parish by a pastor and priests who did everything — serving as builder, expeditor, administrator, as well as priest. There's going to be a gradual transfer of these functions to lay people, and this will be through the parish council.

That brings up another question, Monsignor. What is the major role of a priest today? Has it changed? Will it change more . . . especially with the decline in the number of priests?

It is changing. The priest is going to have more time to serve the people exactly as a priest. Looking back . . . when our people were largely an immigrant people, the priest fulfilled many functions that were not really his. But this was a temporary thing and the moment for it has passed.

Will the concept of a parish, as such, change?

There's been a great deal written about this, but I doubt it. People live in a place; therefore, whatever happens to people happens in a place. I don't see how the church could continue on except by doing the greater part of her work in some territorial fashion, and we call it the parish.

In talking with people, do you see any longing for "the good old days"?

Individuals, yes. In general, no. I suspect that when people talk about the good old days, they're looking back to reacquire the security they had; not the external things. If we trust in the Lord, in the guidance of the church and the Second Vatican Council, we can have that same security and confidence in new forms and new ways.

So you envision, then, the parishioners with all of their talent taking over more of the day-to-day administration and problems affecting the physical side of the church, so that you can devote more time to the spiritual.

That's a fair answer. There are some things that a layman could handle equally well, perhaps better.

What about physical growth, Monsignor. In 1871 there were a handful of people. Three to four hundred, I guess. Now we have about 1500 families. Do you see any future growth?

Yes. Even apart from any numerical growth, I think there will be a relative increase in Catholics . . . by way of people moving into town.

The immediate impact of growth like that would be on the school, wouldn't it?

That's right. No one, for example, in 1870 and for many decades afterwards, would have foreseen a parish in South Hingham. It's almost certain that sometime in the future there's going to be a breaking up of large concentrations of Catholics. This has been the history of the past, and it's going to be part of the future.

You've been here a number of years now. What is your single impression about the direction St. Paul's is going?

I have a very good feeling about St. Paul's. I find it a very friendly community. There's a deep personal relationship among the people themselves, and with their priests and the Sisters. So, my impression is that there's quite a warm feeling in the parish and a legitimate pride as a valid way of expressing their interest. It's a very happy parish in which to be a priest.

What is St. Paul's greatest need?

One that is characteristic of the whole church: the question of how we are handing on the Faith. You can call it C.C.D., Christian education or whatever, but it's obvious that parents are much more involved than at any other time in the past. This same pattern is going to hold true about transfer of the Faith. So, part of the solution to the so-called C.C.D. problem will be an even greater involvement of parents. The work that has to be done in that area is probably our major work.

What about the youth of the parish? I know that Father Geoghan has done a lot of work with the kids . . . and they are the future.

Yes, they are. We're fortunate that the curates have a fine rapport with young people . . . and this is obvious as you go about town. They greet you; talk to you; and, this says something.

They have many needs, and we have a great deal of work to do to satisfy their needs. Priests who visit the parish are very impressed by the attendance of young people at Mass on Sunday. I see in this an indication, not that we don't have any problems, but in general we're happy. Our great need is to make the Faith appealing to young people; to convey to them a conviction about it which their forefathers had. I think they are quite capable, willing and open to this kind of guidance.

I know you alluded to this earlier; but in general, if people are the church . . . are what make it move . . . how can they shape and guide it to do God's work?

For the past ten years, in the church in general and therefore in St. Paul's we have lived through a period of self-examination with a certain amount of apprehension. Why? Because any time we indulge in self-observation we raise questions about ourselves. And questions indicate a certain fear, or indecision. The

great thing we need to do . . . and that we will do . . . is to recover a real deeply felt conviction that the hand of God is with the people of God in St. Paul's church. This is the fact. With that firmly grasped, we can do very great things for God and for people.

It seems to me that the day-to-day responsibilities and ministrations of a priest have increased and changed from the days of a Father Leddy or a Father Mulligan. Will they change even more?

Yes. The priests of a hundred years ago lived in an agricultural society, so their life-style fitted in with the times. Our day is faster moving. One new dimension added to the church in our time is the mobility of people. Ten percent of the people who are in the parish now won't be here next year. They will be in a different parish — someplace else.

That sort of turnover causes a problem in communications, doesn't it?

Yes. It makes a parish start to think beyond its own borders. In other words, it can't plan and operate as if there were no others in the world.

Do you see more of the things like St. Joseph's in Roxbury happening . . . where we get involved with other parishes? Is this in the future?

Very definitely. It has been in the past of the church, so obviously it's going to be in the future. The people who started this parish, and the ethnic groups that came into it later, all had a strong missionary spirit and a deep interest in other people, other places, at other times. I feel strongly that, in the not-too-distant future, we will see a tremendous outpouring of interest and energy that will take people beyond the horizons of the parish.

I know that you want this Centennial Celebration to be a happy occasion for all parishioners. What do you hope it accomplishes?

To look back is to be reassured. Even a man who has had many difficulties and trials in his life . . . and has survived them . . . is reassured when he looks back. This should be the principal outcome of our Centennial Celebration. We look back to where we have been, and how far we have come, happily and successfully. And from that memory we reassure ourselves about the future.

We've touched on many things — people, growth, education. Now I'd like to focus on the spiritual. Do you have any comments on spiritual needs that we haven't covered previously?

Yes. In the seminary today . . . among younger

priests . . . there is a tremendous revival of interest in prayer. When you change an external, there is some danger of throwing away the content; and, to some extent, that has happened in the church. Then, of course, the content has to be recovered, even if it is put in a new package. We've gone through a great deal of intellectual analysis over the past ten years, but this is not Christian life. It is about Christian life. Christian life is actually people who have prayer for the Lord, and concern for loving one another in Christ. This is where the real future of the church is. It means that the deep-down convictions that a person has about God and God's creatures are not just up in his mind. They are part of himself, part of his very fibre. And because he has that, he becomes a Christlike person. He looks at things the way Christ looks. He looks at the Father and at people the way Christ does. This gives a great dynamism and energy to his life as a christian. In the past, this was expressed in certain devotions or activities . . . the Propagation of the Faith, for example. The format of these may not be the same in the future, but the content will still be there. It has to be.

Well, I guess any day is a good day for self-renewal; but a hundred years is a good time to put it all back in place again in your own mind.

That's right. And tradition is experience. The experience of the church in trying to communicate the life and the way of Christ to people demands conviction, which we call Faith; it demands a willingness to sacrifice, which is the imitation of the Cross; and it demands a giving of ourselves, without counting the cost.

Monsignor, I'd say those three things sum up what a saint is.

Just about.

As a conclusion, I'd like to say that the faith has always meant for people a great conviction about the loving care of God for them and a sense of the very special place that our Blessed Mother occupies for them in the life of the church — as the Mother of Christ, and as the most perfect Christian. Whatever form our devotion takes in the future, whatever form that our liturgy takes, the heart of it will be a great personal devotion to Christ, and to the Mother of the Lord.

So, the forms have been examined for the past ten years; but one of the signs that the church is moving forward again is the growing personal love of Christ — the same center — and a growing personal love of Mary, as the example of what the perfect follower of the Lord is.

OFFICERS OF THE CENTENNIAL MASS OF THANKSGIVING

St. Paul's Church

Hingham, Mass.

September 11, 1971

Principal Celebrant:	Most Rev. Humberto S. Medeiros, D.D.
Concelebrants:	Rev. Msgr. John J. Sheehan Rev. Msgr. Joseph P. Burke Rev. James W. Morrissey Rev. John J. Geoghan
Deacons of Celebration:	Rev. Mr. Paul E. Miceli Rev. Mr. William P. Joy
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Lectors:	Sister M. Damasus, C.S.J. Mr. Richard K. Mason
Altar Boys:	Charles J. Flint Thomas Beneducci Richard J. McGinn John J. Handrahan William C. Schmid
Bearers of the Liturgical Gifts:	Mr. Richard R. Hudner Mr. Victor J. Moto Mr. Edward L. Doyle Mrs. Charles R. Thurston Mrs. Frank M. Kavanagh Mrs. Andrew A. Spirito Mr. Joseph W. Nevins, Jr. Mr. John H. Carlin Mr. Charles F. Souther
Ushers:	Mr. James J. McGinn Mr. John B. Lombardo Mr. Joseph P. Cunningham Mr. William J. Coleman Mr. William E. Kirsch Mr. Richard F. Sweeney

Music for the Centennial Mass was provided by members of the St. John's Seminary
Choir under the direction of the Reverend Francis V. Strahan, M.A., B.Mus.

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The contributions of time and talent given so generously by the many members of the parish and the community to the success of this Centennial Celebration are acknowledged with grateful thanks.

