



The dove is a symbol of the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY

A Crown Atop the Diocese

What do St. Louis Parish in Dorchester, St. Joseph Parish in Fairview, and St. Mary Parish in Neillsville have in common? A number of things, actually. All were founded in the 1870's. All are situated in the Thorp Deanery in the northern part of the Diocese. All had schools at one point in their history.

And, tragically, each parish lost all or parts of their church buildings to fire.

In 1942, a fire inside St. Louis in Dorchester ruined much of the building's interior. "Three altar servers," recounts the Diocesan commemorative book, *Feed my Lambs*, "took it upon themselves to save the Blessed Sacrament from the fire." At St. Joseph, Fairview, both church and school burned in 1887—followed by a second ruinous church fire in 1933. Over at St. Mary Parish in Neillsville, lightning struck the building in 1923, and the church was reduced to ashes.

But inspired by faith, moved by devotion, dedicated to hard work—and, let us presume, aided by our Diocesan builder-patron, St. Joseph the Workman—these parishes raised churches out of razed ruins.

When I first heard these stories, the mythological Phoenix came to mind. This "Firebird," it was held, returned to life out of the ashes of its former self. But in this particularly Catholic context, a better avian analogy for what these parishes accomplished is found in our Faith's own "Firebird," the Holy Spirit.

In the Church's Liturgy of the Hours, Pope St. Gregory the Great (d.604) describes heaven's fiery yet gentle advocate this way: "[T]he Holy Spirit reveals his presence to men not only as a dove but also as fire. For the dove symbolizes simplicity, and the fire, intense dedication. Thus the dove and the fire, taken together, have a special significance: whoever is filled with the Spirit becomes so

dedicated to this gentle simplicity that he is also aflame with the zeal of righteousness" (Office of Readings, 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time). Given the zeal these parishes showed at that time in history, it is hard not to see the Holy Spirit igniting the industry and commitment of our Thorp ancestors, inspiring them to redouble their faith and rebuild their churches.

Indeed, the Person of the Holy Spirit is always present to inspire faith in Christ. In a memorable passage from the Gospel of St. Luke, Jesus begins his public ministry at Nazareth's synagogue with words from the Prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (4:18). The passage of Isaiah from which he reads speaks to these remarkable parishes in the Thorp Deanery: "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, to [among many other things] place on those who mourn in Zion a diadem instead of ashes, to give them oil of gladness instead of mourning, a glorious mantle instead of a faint spirit" (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Thus, out of the ashes, the Holy Spirit and Jesus inspired this trinity of parishes to crown the top of our Diocese with an example of fidelity, an example that we pray spreads like wildfire throughout western Wisconsin as we celebrate the Diocese's 150th year. Indeed, as St. Joseph Parish, St. Mary Parish, and St. Louis Parish continue to serve the people in the area under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may their faith and devotion illuminate those around them, both near and far.

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