

Opinion

After 200 Years, what is our central legacy?

Scot Landry

On April 8, 1808 Pope Pius VII established the Diocese of Boston. Though its territory covered all the New England states, the total Catholic population of the fledgling diocese numbered only about 1,000. Over the past 200 years, our diocese has been elevated to an archdiocese and has spawned 10 other New England dioceses. Within the 144 cities and towns of Eastern Massachusetts that now comprise the archdiocese, we minister to 2 million Catholics.

The 200-year history of the Archdiocese of Boston is an amazing story of growth, devotion and generous service. Catholics here have overcome many hardships and discrimination to welcome their fellow immigrants, care for those in need, and build a large network of parishes, schools and Catholic service agencies.

We have many institutions, buildings, and other tangible measures of our accomplishments. But after 200 years, what is the central aspect of our legacy?

Though there are surely many different answers to that question, I'd like to highlight one I've received recently.

Martin Doman, a Catholic musician in his early 30s, has been a frequent worship leader at many events in our archdiocese. He knows our archdiocese well and loves being a part of its ongoing renewal. As music leader for the 2008 Boston Catholic Men's and Women's Conferences, Martin was asked to write a conference theme song related to the archdiocese's bicentennial.

Martin's prayerful reflection, which he has put to music, has a clear answer as to what he considers the archdiocese's legacy. (I encourage you to read the full lyrics or listen to "You are Our Legacy" on Boston200.org, the Bicentennial Web site of the archdiocese).

Doman opens the song noting that God (through Pope Pius VII) gathered Catholics here as a local Church and fed us spiritually:

*When we began, from all the nations
You gathered us into this land
And in Word and in Sacrament
You carried us with Your hand.*

He then goes on to describe the "heavy lifting" done by the first generations of Catholics in New England:

*We follow the path, our ancestors gave us
Upon their broad shoulders we stand
Their sufferings gave birth to our freedom
Their love was the work of Your hands.*

Doman mentions that the work of the Church has been the same throughout the 200 years:

*Giving help to the helpless
A home for the homeless
A servant to all those in need
A light in the darkness
Your dawn shines upon us
You are the hope that we seek.*

In his refrain, Doman concludes with what he believes our legacy is as an archdiocese:

*This is our legacy
This is the song that we sing
From age to age, You remain the same
You are our legacy
You are the song that we sing
You have been, are, and ever shall ever be
Our legacy.*

Doman considers Christ to be our legacy; to be the treasure that we've inherited and will hand on to others in the same way that the earliest Christian disciples took the good news to all the nations. In every time and place, Christ "remains the same;" and that "You (Christ) have been, are, and ever shall be our legacy."

One great way to celebrate that legacy and commemorate this year's bicentennial is to join Martin Doman and thousands of others at the 2008 Boston Catholic Men's and Women's Conferences on April 18-19 at Boston College's Conte Forum. There is a strong program of speakers and other events to explore and deepen one's faith. These events will likely be the largest local gatherings of Catholics this year to worship Christ together and to pray that our third century as Boston Catholics will be a time of great grace and blessing.

For more information about the song "You are Our Legacy" or about the 2008 Boston Catholic Men's and Women's Conferences, please see www.CatholicBoston.com. Happy 200th birthday Boston!

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