

Holy Things, Holy People

Exploring Catholic history in the Northwest through treasures from the past

PART 13: STATUE MADE BY THE CARMEL OF SEATTLE

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One of the humbler treasures at St. James Cathedral is a statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel dating from 1960. Made of porcelain, the statue shows Mary cradling the child Jesus. Both wear crowns and hold scapulars, the characteristic garment of Carmelite religious. The imagery is commonplace, but there is something special about this particular statue. If you pull on the pearl near Mary's wrist, you find a secret message written on a long ribbon, carefully rolled inside the porcelain statue. It reads: "365 Carmelite days that Our Lady may have many good things up her sleeve for our Archbishop in 1961... 1962... 1963..." and so on, through 1969. The statue was made by the Carmelites of Seattle and presented as a gift to Archbishop Connolly for Christmas, 1960. The statue is a charming reminder of the presence of Carmelite religious in Seattle.

The story of the Carmelite of Seattle begins with Malcolm McDougal. McDougal was a Canadian logger and a devout Catholic—if he missed Mass while working in the remote woods of Ontario, he would make it up by attending two Masses when he was back in town. McDougal made a fortune in lumber, and brought his family to Seattle in 1885, hoping the climate would benefit the health of his wife and children. He purchased a 360-acre lot south of Seattle which the family named Orillia after their home in Canada. The family was touched by tragedy: they lost two children in infancy, and in 1890 their youngest son died in a tragic accident while at boarding school in Spokane.

In 1894, Anna McDougal, one of the remaining daughters, felt a call to become a Carmelite religious. But the only Carmelite communities in the United States at that time were in Baltimore, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Boston. Anna decided to enter the Baltimore Carmel. Each year her parents made the cross-country trip to see their daughter.

After his wife's death in 1907, Malcolm McDougal wanted his daughter closer. He offered to sponsor a new Carmelite foundation on the west coast. He thought California would be the best place for it, because of the climate. But when he mentioned this dream of his to Bishop O'Dea, the Bishop jokingly said, "If you make that foundation in California I'll excommunicate you!" That very night O'Dea sent a telegram to the Baltimore Carmel, inviting them to establish a community in Seattle. The delighted McDougal, meanwhile, purchased a plot of land at 18th Avenue and East Howell on Capitol Hill, and immediately set about building a convent. He was not entirely sure how people in the neighborhood would react to the presence of cloistered religious in their



Our Lady of Mt. Carmel with a message up her sleeve, Christmas, 1960. St. James Cathedral.

midst. So when people asked him what he was building, he would reply truthfully but evasively, "a house for my sweetheart"!

Four sisters from the Baltimore Carmel, including Anna McDougal (now Sister Cyril of the Mother of God) were chosen to become the founding members of the new Seattle Carmel. McDougal himself went to Baltimore to escort them to their new home.

The group set forth on July 3, 1908 and journeyed by train, while Mother Raphael recorded everything in her journal. They passed through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. At their hotel in St. Paul, Mother Raphael wrote, "Mr. McDougal motioned us to step into what appeared to be a small room with seats on the side. All followed and sat down. Before I realized it, the little room began to move and I found I was in an elevator"!

The convent was not yet finished, so the Sisters stayed at Orillia for their first few months in Seattle. Bishop O'Dea was their first visitor, expressing his delight at their presence, and reserving the Blessed Sacrament in the small chapel for them.

They immediately began to live according to the Carmelite rule: a well-ordered and quite busy rhythm of prayer, work, and community, from their rising at 5:45am until bed at 11:00pm. Thus Malcolm McDougal had his beloved daughter under his own roof again, at least until December 8, 1908, when Bishop O'Dea blessed the new monastery.

The Sisters remained in their Capitol Hill monastery for more than fifty years, but it became inconvenient when tall apartment buildings threatened the privacy of the enclosure, a key aspect of the Carmelite vocation. The Sisters needed a new convent, and they found a champion in Archbishop Connolly. He raised the money for a new building in north Seattle (now Shoreline) by asking each parish to give half of the 1960 Christmas collection to the cause. That same Christmas, the Sisters presented him with a statue of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel they had made in their ceramics workshop—a statue with a grateful message up her sleeve.

—Corinna Laughlin, Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy

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