

Holy Things, Holy People

Exploring Catholic history in the Northwest through treasures from the past

PART 38: HAS THE IMMIGRANT KEPT THE FAITH? BY GERALD SHAUGHNESSY

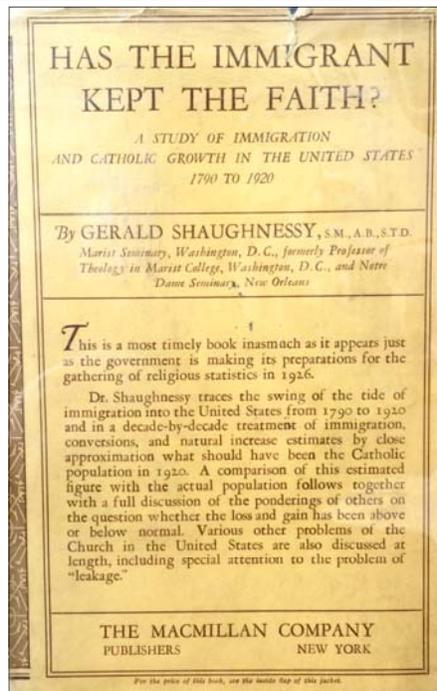
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Each Sunday, as we gather in the Cathedral for Mass, thousands of other Catholics gather in parishes and missions across the Archdiocese of Seattle. In union with the Church throughout the world, we all hear the same readings and offer the same prayers. But we do so in a multitude of languages. Each week in western Washington, Masses are offered in Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Swahili, Laotian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Polish, and Samoan, among others. In one of the most diverse parts of the country, we are a diverse Church—a Church of immigrants.

Seattle has always been a Church of immigrants. In the early days of the diocese, clergy gatherings must have been an interesting experience, to say the least, with priests from French Canada, Belgium, France, Germany, and other nations, serving side-by-side. Some were fluent in English; others were struggling to learn it. One of the reasons Bishop Blanchet journeyed to Mexico in search of funds for the newly-established Diocese of Nesqually—rather than the east coast of the United States—was that he was fluent in Spanish, but could hardly speak English at the time!

The diverse and polyglot nature of the diocese must be one reason that Bishop Gerald Shaughnessy, SM was sent to Seattle in 1932 as our fourth Bishop. Born in Massachusetts in 1887, Shaughnessy had never visited Seattle before his appointment—the closest he had come was one visit to California and a short stint as a teacher in Anaconda, Montana (where, coincidentally, one of the students he coached on the basketball team would later become the mother of Archbishop Hunthausen!). Shaughnessy was a Marist and proudly retained his community's initials, "SM," even after he became a bishop.

Shaughnessy was fascinated by statistics, and in his doctoral dissertation at the Catholic University of America, he decided to focus on immigration. In particular, he wanted to test the validity of a common perception about Catholic immigrants in the United States. The narrative went like this: the immigrants who flooded to the United States in the 19th century must have abandoned their Catholic faith in huge numbers. Otherwise, the number of Catholics in the United States would be vastly larger than it was. This narrative was accepted unquestioningly by many Church leaders in the



Gerald Shaughnessy's book *Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith?* was published by Macmillan in 1925. Archives of St. James Cathedral. Shaughnessy would become the Fourth Bishop of Seattle in 1933.

United States (and Rome), and Shaughnessy wanted to find out if it was true. His dissertation was published in 1925 under the provocative title *Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith?*

In his study, Shaughnessy analyzes the Catholic population in the United States, decade by decade, beginning in 1790, when John Carroll became the first Archbishop of Baltimore. In painstaking detail, he traces waves of immigration from many countries through many years, in the process touching on historical movements that impacted the Catholic Church both in Europe and in the United States. He writes about cholera epidemics, revolutions, persecutions of various kinds, "Know-Nothings," Masons, the California Gold Rush, and financial booms and panics, showing how each of these events retarded or advanced Catholic growth. He compares the population of foreign-born Catholics and the growth of the native-born population, and notes the numbers of conversions to the faith along the way.

In the end, Shaughnessy answers the question "Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith?" with a resounding "yes." "It is due to immigration that the Catholic Church in America today stands out among her sister Churches of other nations, the equal of any, if not indeed superior to all, in loyalty, vitality, fidelity, and stability." But there is more. The Church in the United States, Shaughnessy argues, is unique in the world. "Not another instance in history is recorded, where millions of different races and nationalities, of varied natural prejudices and leanings, made their way to a strange country... there to build up what they found practically non-existent, a flourishing, closely-knit, firmly welded Church."

Perhaps it is not so surprising, after all, that Shaughnessy was appointed Bishop of Seattle in 1933. The Catholic Church in

Seattle was exactly what he had described in *Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith?*: it was a local Church that was alive and thriving, not in spite of the presence of so many immigrants, but precisely because of them.

—Corinna Laughlin, Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy

This is Immigrant Heritage Month! Stop by Cathedral Hall after the morning Masses on June 12 to find out more.