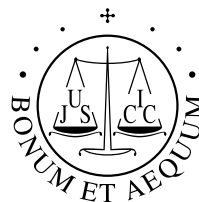


Church Law Society



CHURCH REPORTER

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The Czech Chapel in the National Shrine of Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.: The Infant Jesus of Prague, the Prague Castle, and the Shrine of the Infant Jesus of Prague. Photo by Zábaj Horák.

3rd July 2021: Hermit Donated Church Bells



The parish and pilgrimage church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Strašín in southwestern Bohemia (pictured left) has received new bells after more than a hundred years. Hermit *Anděl* (*Angel*), surname *Homola*, member of the Czech Capuchin Province, inspired by the Mother of God Virgin Mary, was inspired more than a year ago to help the church. He collected nuts, herbs, asked people for gifts. For the money obtained, he had two bells made at a well-known company in Přerov in northern Moravia. Hermit Anděl himself lives near Brno in southern Moravia.

The church in Strašín has Romanesque foundations and underwent Gothic and Baroque reconstruction. It lost its bells, made in 1507, during the First World War, when Austro-Hungarian Empire confiscated them and remelted them for their war purposes.

The bells were consecrated in Strašín by the diocesan bishop of České Budějovice, Mons. Vlastimil Kročil (pictured below) on Saturday, 3rd July 2021. The celebration was organized by the village of Strašín, headed by the mayor, and the local Catholic parish.

The larger bell weighing 290 kg is dedicated to Saint Joseph, the smaller bell weighing 129 kg to the Virgin Mary. The reliefs with motifs of St. Joseph, the Mother of God of Strašín and the Church of Strašín for bells were modelled by the artist Stanislav Míka. According to the parish priest Revd Petr Koutský, the new bells will not only invite believers to services, but will ring every day at noon, and every evening at 6 pm for Angelus. Participants in this year's festive pilgrimage on Sunday 12th September 2021 can also look forward to this year's ceremonial ringing in Strašín.

The fact that the bells will ring again throughout the region is considered a blessing by the locals.



Tornado Hit Southern Moravia



Moravská Nová Ves (South Moravia), St. James Church after Tornado, Photo Jan Beránek, Czech TV.

On Thursday, 24th June 2021, in the early evening, a devastating tornado hit South Moravia. Four villages and a part of the town of Hodonín were most affected by its rage. 6 people died and hundreds were injured, the damage to property was immeasurable. During the tornado, the parish priest Marián Kalina celebrated Mass in the church of Saint James in Moravská Nová Ves. At quarter to eight in the evening, he noticed the vibration of the iron window structures, the breaking of the windowpanes, and the subsequent collapse of the church vault. The parish priest and 25 parishioners present hid under the tower and none of them were injured. However, the church was damaged.

The tornado caused a huge wave of solidarity throughout the Czech Republic. Thousands of volunteers come to the scene to help clear the damage. The diocesan charity Brno announced a collection to help all those affected, and hundreds of millions of Czech koruna were raised during the week. Diocesan Bishop of Brno Mons. Vojtěch Cikrle announced a collection in all the churches of the diocese on Sunday 27th June. Similar events were carried out by charitable organizations of other churches, especially the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, the Czechoslovak Hussite Church and ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) Czech Republic. Help also came from Slovakia, Austria, Poland, Hungary and Croatia.

The next day, the affected villages were visited by the Bishop of Brno Mons. Vojtěch Cikrle. He handed over a personal financial gift and material assistance. Auxiliary Bishop of Brno, Member of the Church Law Society, Mons. Pavel Konzbul, celebrated Mass in the ruined church of Saint James in Moravská Nová Ves on Sunday, 4th July. Seminarians from the Brno diocese are among the volunteers who help with the restoration of the affected villages on the spot.

This year's national pilgrimage, which, as every year, takes place on the state and ecclesiastical feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius on 5th July at the pilgrimage basilica of Velehrad in South Moravia, a symbol of the capital of the ancient Great Moravian Empire, was marked by prayer and material assistance for the affected area. More than 15 000 believers took part in the pilgrimage. The main celebrant of the pilgrimage Mass was Cardinal Dominik Duka, Primate of Bohemia, from Prague.

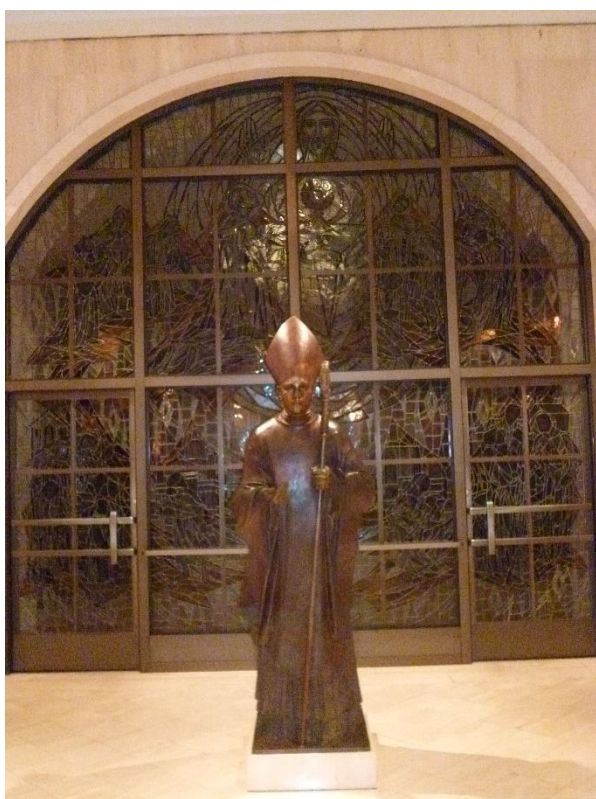
This was followed by the usual session of the Czech Bishops' Conference, which convenes bishops from all over the Czech Republic that day.

Jan Beránek, Jiří Rajmund Tretera, Zábaj Horák

From This Year's Celebrations of St. John Nepomucene Neumann

In the last issue of the Church Reporter, we reported on this year's celebrations of the 300th anniversary of the birth of St. John of Nepomuk (1345–1393), Vicar General, martyr who laid down his life to defend the freedom of the Church and the seal of confession. As every year, the celebrations culminated on the eve of his feast day on 16th May, not only with a solemn Mass in the cathedral, but also with folk celebrations on the Vltava River called *Navalis*, which were renewed in Prague in 2011.

We will now recall the traditional June celebrations of his namesake, St. John Nepomucene Neumann (1811–1860), a devotee and the first saint of the USA.



Saint John Nepomucene Statue in Czech Chapel in Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C.

Photo Zábaj Horák

John Nepomucene Neumann was born on 28th March 1811 in Prachatice in southern Bohemia. The same day he was baptized in the local Gothic church of St. James. He was the fourth of six children. His father Johann Neumann came from Bavaria, his mother Agnes née Lepší was a Czech from a local family.

After finishing elementary school, his father sent him to study at a grammar school in České Budějovice, even though he was a poor stocking manufacturer. It was a grammar school of the Piarist fathers. At that time, no one could have guessed that after 1990, the

Bishop's Grammar School of John Nepomucene Neumann would be founded in České Budějovice.

After graduating in 1829, he studied philosophy for two years and was faced with the question of what profession he wanted to pursue. He himself inclined to medicine with the support of his father, who was even ready to pay high tuition fees. John changed his mind at the last moment. The call from above to the priesthood was stronger after all. And so on 1st November, 1831 he entered the priestly seminary in České Budějovice.

From 1833 he studied theology in Prague. Even then, he wondered if he was called to become a missionary in America. Therefore, he attended lectures in French and learned English by beginning to correspond with missionaries in America.

He was supposed to be ordained in 1835, but this did not happen, although he studied with excellent results. The diocese of České Budějovice had more priests at that time than was needed. And they looked down their nose at Neumann. In the list of candidates for the priesthood, he was placed “below the line”. He was too orthodox. He did not belong to those who obediently accept the doctrine of state dirigisme in relation to the church and faith. So Neumann decided to actually go to the United States, even though he had only a lower ordination and did not receive any letters of recommendation.



The Memorial Stone in the Czech Chapel in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the largest Roman Catholic church in North America.

The stone holds three containers of soil: from the birth house of John Nepomucene Neumann in Prachaticce, from the Shrine of Svatý Hostýn (Moravian pilgrimage destination at the site of the victorious battle memorial with Tatars in 1241), and from the chapel of Saint Wenceslaus in the Saint Vitus Cathedral in Prague.

Photo Záboj Horák

Jan Nepomucene Neumann overcame all travel difficulties and arrived in Le Havre, where he worked hard for some time in the port in order to buy a boat ticket. He began a sea voyage on 20th April 1836. On 1st June 1836, he landed in New York. And in two days he was greeted with great joy by the third Bishop of New York, John Dubois (actually Jean Dubois). He was the first non-Irish bishop of New York, originally from France. Neumann spoke all the languages of the immigrants. After a serious conversation, the bishop was convinced that he needed just such a priest. And so he ordained him a priest on 25th June 1836. The bishop sent him to the border of the Diocese of New York with Canada, to Williamsville below Niagara Falls. There were already 200 000 Catholics in the entire diocese of New York at that time, and their number was growing rapidly due to the then culminating immigration from Europe.

The young priest was very popular among believers. He earned for his dedication, when he was willing to travel long distances due to baptism and the dying people, which he provided for the last journey. And also because of the care he gave to the education of children. He soon realized that not only did immigrant children often know nothing about God or faith, but they were often unable to speak English properly or their original languages. Neumann was *gifted teacher*, and even after years his students lovingly remembered his *stories* he told in order to introduce the *Bible* and the *Catechism* in the classroom. Already in the first period of his work he built three schools, several churches, and parsonages.

He was still on the move for more than four years. In addition to teaching religion, he often travelled on foot through swampy land, from station to station, from house to house, in the cold winter and summer heat, visiting the sick, helping the dying, baptizing new-borns, instilling faith and zeal. In his three quasi-parishes, there were 65 baptisms and 8 weddings a year. Neumann's workload was heavy, mainly due to the considerable distances that he had to complete on foot. He travelled with a backpack on his back that contained his chasuble and other things. The figure of a fast-paced petty priest soon become known throughout the country.

During this time, he began to experience spiritual aridity and tiredness. He feared that his love for God was less and less zealous. He overcame the worst period when his brother Václav came to see him in 1840, who helped with the construction and teaching of religion. In the summer of 1840, Neumann collapsed from exhaustion for several months.

At that time, however, a new vision came: he received God's *calling* to join the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. Neumann's bishop, as usual, opposed the request for permission to join the order. Eventually, he changed his mind and gave permission to enter the order. As early as 1840, John could rejoice in his stay at the order's novitiate in Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania). After taking the vows of the order in 1842, he was active in Baltimore (Maryland), i.e., directly at the centre of immigration. In 1844 he became superior of the religious house and in 1847 provincial superior of all Redemptorists in the United States. His native brother Václav (Wenceslas) Neumann joined Redemptorists as a lay brother.

The fulfilment of Neumann's mission in the *Redemptorist* order was not accidental. This religious congregation was founded by the lawyer Saint Alfons Maria de Liguori in Naples to *take care of the most abandoned people*, sailors, immigrants, out-of-the-way villagers, shepherds in the mountains, places of pilgrimage. Emphasis was placed on *preaching God's word* and *confession*.

On the recommendation of the Archbishop of Baltimore, he was appointed Bishop of *Philadelphia*, Pennsylvania, on 5th February 1852, by the Pope. The more he travelled, he built churches, during his tenure an average of one church a month was consecrated in the diocese, as well as schools. During his 8 years in the diocese, he founded 100 schools, 80 churches and reformed the seminary.

He was, in fact, the first to organize a diocesan school system in the United States. He was assisted by parents who wanted their children to be educated in the Catholic tradition. Because there were many non-English Catholics in Philadelphia, he began creating so-called national parishes for them. The reason was both pastoral and social. The Church was their support in the event that they fell into social difficulties.

The great diocese was not rich, and Bishop Neumann became famous for his personal moderation. He wore only one pair of shoes at a time throughout his stay in the United States. When he received a new robe as a gift, he often gave it to a new priest in his diocese. Neumann, disgusted by the conflicts, anti-Catholic violence and arson, later wrote to Rome and asked to be replaced by another bishop. But the request was rejected by Pope Pius IX.

In the years 1854/1855 he finally visited Europe and during this journey he visited his native country for the last time. He travelled to Rome for a longer stay. Here, as a representative of the American bishops, he attended the solemn proclamation of an article of faith on the Immaculate Conception on 8th December 1854. He spent some time in Rome and introduced many Catholic figures to his efforts to expand education in America and to provide care for immigrants from Europe. The Pope Pius IX also received him for a private audience and expressed his approval and admiration.

On the way back, Bishop Jan Nepomucene Neumann visited his native town Prachatice. Although he tried to keep the visit a secret, the locals prepared a ceremonial reception for him. There is a *Czech record* about him in the local registry. They also fired from a cannon. Bishop Neumann celebrated Mass for the first time and preached in the church of St. James (see photo), in which he had been baptized as a child. After returning to the USA, he continued to work.



On 5th January 1860, at the age of 48, he collapsed on the street and died of a stroke. His last prayer was Hail Mary in his *native Czech*.

Saint John Nepomucene Neumann, whose memory is celebrated today on 19th June, is remembered especially in America and the Czech lands. He is buried in Philadelphia. In the Czech lands, he is revered especially in his native Prachatice.

Prachatice still remember their famous native with love. Not only is a side chapel dedicated to him in the local church, but there is still Neumann's birthplace, which is now used as the convent of the Sisters of Mercy of St. Charles Borromeo. Near the monastery there is a hospice run by the Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo that bears Neumann's name.

The Sisters of Mercy got to Prachatice thanks to the sister of St. John Neumann, Karolína Johanna Neumannová.

She was the first ever novice of the congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of St. Charles Borromeo, which was allowed to enter the novitiate of the newly established order in Bohemia. This was at a time when the monasteries that had been abolished in the Austrian lands during the reign of Emperor Joseph II could finally be restored, and when new monasteries, usually as congregations, could be established. In 1860, after the death of the father of the Neumann

siblings, Karolína Johanna inherited her native home. In the same year, she founded a monastic community in it, which lasts in Prachatice with the exception of interruptions during Communist totalitarianism to this day. There is now a monastery chapel in the room where the saint was born.

This year, the celebration of St. John Nepomucene Neumann, which took place on Saturday 21st June in Prachatice was particularly joyful. Not only has 210 years passed since the saint's birth this year, but also the *parish church was newly blessed*. Church of St. James was under reconstruction for several years and after a demanding reconstruction it was the first Holy Mass to be celebrated in a cleanly restored church. The main celebrant was the Bishop of Litoměřice Mons. Jan Baxant (see photo), who was Vicar General of the Diocese of České Budějovice in 2003–2008. In his sermon, he recalled the life and ministry of St. John Nepomucene Neumann and its significance for today, especially his emphasis on *Catholic education* and the role of priests as *confessors*.



The service was attended by a number of local representatives, including Ing. Tomáš Jirsa, Senator of the Parliament of the Czech Republic for the Český Krumlov constituency. Mayor of Prachatice Ing. Martin Malý highlighted the exemplary cooperation between the city and the parish in his speech.

In addition to the very peak of the celebrations, the Holy Mass, there were a number of accompanying events in Prachatice. It was possible to visit the exposition of the Prachatice Museum free of charge, where one of the expositions is dedicated to the life of St. John Neumann. It was also possible to visit the Sisters of Mercy in their monastery, who, especially on the days of the celebrations, accompanied the pilgrims.

Text: Vojtěch Círus, Jiří Rajmund Tretera

Photo: Zdeněk Příbyl, Kateřina Zlesáková, Záboj Horák

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Photo on the front page: The Czech Chapel in the National Shrine of Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.: The Infant Jesus of Prague, the Prague Castle, and the Shrine of the Infant Jesus of Prague. Photo by Záboj Horák.

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