

Gathering with the Diaspora

Fr. Michael Tracey

I flew into Boston's Logan airport recently. The fall colors were spectacular as we cruised low in over Boston harbor and terra firma. The drive to our hotel was peppered with hues of browns and golds as nature heralded another transition on his circular rendezvous.

We traveled down Interstate 95 while the large skyscrapers saluted us on the way. We drove into the famous "Big Dig" and exited unscathed on the other side.

Arriving at my hotel, I was surprised by my sister and her husband who had flown in from Ireland for the special occasion. Surviving the surprise, I settled into a comfortable room and adjusted to the fall Boston weather.

The weekend kicked off with a visit to an Irish pub and its pub food where I met several of my fellow county persons who now reside in various parts of the United States. On Saturday night, we gathered for the grand gala to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the County Mayo Association of Boston. A flurry of food, visiting, speeches, presentations, music and dancing continued into the early morning hours.

As I walked around among the 700 guests, I connected with several people from my homeland. I listened to their journeys to places such as New York, Cleveland, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia and Toronto, Canada. They shared stories of how poverty and lack of opportunities in the 1950's, and '60's propelled them into a new world.

I thought about my own journey to Mississippi and how I could connect with other emigrants. I noticed how all these people connected with each other, not only once a year at a gala celebration but through everyday activities. I was impressed by the vast network of relationships they had forged with each other over the years as well as how they maintained a special and ongoing connection with their homeland.

On Sunday, I celebrated Mass for the group. The experience was a first and rather unique one. As I stood there at the altar, I thought of the many backgrounds represented. Yet, they shared some special things in common. They shared a common root system and loyalty to their home county. More especially, they shared a faith that sustained them in their transitions to a new country and still connected them with their homeland. Listening to many of the songs at Mass that were sung in the Irish language, I realized how these people had a deeper love and loyalty to their culture and language, even in a new country.

Later on in the afternoon, a group of us went to visit the gravesite of Fr. Patrick Peyton, the famous "Rosary Priest." He championed the rosary as a powerful prayer through his contact with celebrities and rosary rallies years earlier. His motto was a very fitting one – "The family that prays together, stays together."

The group laid a wreath at his grave and I led the rosary with the group. This brought back my own experience of praying the rosary on bended knees on concrete kitchen floors during my childhood in Ireland.

One of the group members shared his experience of serving Mass for Fr. Peyton when he was a little boy in his home community in Ireland. Obviously, such an experience impacted this man's life and helped his continuing connection with his own faith journey. I also thought of how our modern altar servers may be impacted by the example, faith and dedication of our present priests.

I left Boston with a grateful heart that was reenergized by encounters with so many dedicated; faith filled, committed, and rooted fellow county men and women. For me, the experience was a personal retreat in words, encounters and reaffirmation of my faith. I realized that gathering with the Diaspora in our lives, helps us become more connected with ourselves, others and our God.