



PRESS RELEASE

INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST

Contact: M. Cristina Borges, Development Director
Tel 773 363 7409
Fax 773 363 7824
cborges@institute-christ-king.org

Cardinal George in Special Ceremony at the Shrine of Christ the King Sovereign Priest

(Chicago, November 26, 2007) A historic landmark church in Chicago, once on the road to demolition, will be the site of a rare ceremony following Christmas, on December 29th. During the course of a Solemn High Mass in the traditional Latin form, Francis Cardinal George will solemnly crown a statue of the Infant Jesus at the Shrine of Christ the King Sovereign Priest, formerly known as St. Gelasius Church in south side Woodlawn. The antique wooden sculpture from southern Spain will be the central piece above the future high altar of the church that is now being restored.

The magnificent church building, designed by revivalist architect Henry Schlacks in the 1920s, was the center of much controversy when in 2003 it was slated to be razed but eventually was made a historic landmark of Chicago. Originally known as “St. Clara Carmelite Church,” it had been commissioned by Carmelite Friars of the Old Observance to replace a smaller structure of this parish founded by German immigrants in 1894. The church had the distinction of being the National Shrine of St. Therese of Lisieux, where weekly novena prayers were held beginning on the very day of her canonization in 1925 until the mid 1980s. Vicissitudes affecting the neighborhood, a fire in the 1970s, disrepair and a dwindling congregation eventually led to the church’s closure in 2002.

However, after its near brush with destruction, St. Clara/St. Gelasius Church was given new life when Cardinal George invited the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest to take charge of it.

The Institute is a society of priests established in 1990 in Florence, Italy, that, with permission of the Vatican, celebrates Mass and all the sacraments according to the 1962 liturgical books – the traditional form of the Latin Rite recently given new impetus by Pope Benedict XVI in his motu proprio *Summorum Pontificum*. The group’s experience in reforming and restoring church buildings to their former beauty, coupled with the track record of growth in the “Latin Mass” milieu, made the Institute of Christ the King a good fit for the task of transforming the gutted former St. Gelasius into a living church.

Indeed, since the Institute began regularly offering Mass in 2005 using a provisional chapel in the adjacent rectory, the congregation has increased from no congregation at all to one that recently required that a second Mass be added on Sundays for lack of space. In June 2006, the church received its decree of erection as the Shrine of Christ the King Sovereign Priest.

The Cardinal’s ceremonial crowning of the Infant Jesus during Christmastide this year is of special significance for the church. The first Mass ever offered inside the building was on Christmas 1924, a few years prior to its completion. And 2007 marks the 80th anniversary of the dedication of the church, on May 15, 1927. Those who attend the Solemn High Mass at 1:30 pm on Saturday, December 29th, will be treated to what many describe as the “transcendent beauty” of the Latin Mass, with its ancient prayers chanted in Latin, studied and choreographed movements, moments of silent prayer, incense, beautiful vessels and vestments, and timeless music. Members of the Chicago Chorale will sing William Byrd’s four-voice polyphonic setting of the Mass, as well as motets by Tomás Luis de Victoria and Josquin de Près. The Gregorian Chant will be provided by the Shrine’s own schola.

This Christmas season, the ever-growing congregation at the Shrine of Christ the King will be moved from the basement-chapel in the rectory to the historic church when regular Sunday Mass again returns to the once-shuttered building. On Christmas Eve, Mass will be at 11:00 pm. On Christmas Day there will be the traditional “Mass at Dawn” at 8:00 am (Low Mass) and the “Mass during the Day” at 10:00 am (High Mass). For more information call 773-363-7409.

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