175th Birthday Celebration Sunday

By CLAIRE PUNEKY

PLATTENVILLE, La. — The 175th anniversary of the establishment of the Parish of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the oldest church parish on historic Bayou Lafourche, will be observed here Sunday at 4:30 p.m.

The Most Rev. Robert E. Tracy, D. D., Bishop of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, will be principal celebrant of a concelebrated Mass of Thanksgiving in the church and will deliver the homily.

Concelebrants will be the Rev. Anthony J. Rousso, pastor, Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, Cut Off; the Rev. John A. Weber, pastor, St. Philip Church, Vacherie; the Rev. Joseph E. McLaughlin, vice-chancellor, Diocese of Baton Rouge.

A reception on the church grounds will follow the Mass. The committee in charge of arrangements comprises Mrs. Marian L. Blanchard, Miss Dolores Bordis, Floyd Dugas, Elton Laborde, Carol LeBlanc, U. B. Simoneaux, Mrs. Marie R. Temple, Mrs. Thelma Thibodeaux, Mrs. Clara C. Triche, Risely Triche and Miss Vivian Truxillo.

The parish was founded in 1783 during the Spanish regime and a small church was built with the Rev. Bernardo de Deva, a Spanish Capuchin, as the pastor.

He was pastor when the parish was incorporated in 1811 and the articles of incorporation were signed by William C. Claiborne, first governor of Louisiana. In 1817 a board of church wardens formed by Father de Deva voted to build a better church building, and he laid the cornerstone in 1818.

The church was dedicated in 1819. In 1832, the Rev. Charles Boutelou de St. Aubin came to the parish, obtained Sisters of Mount Carmel for the Diocese, and in 1833 their first convent was opened in Plattenville.

In 1835, Plattenville was chosen for a Diocesan Seminary by Bishop Antoine Blanc of the Diocese of New Orleans, and the two-story structure of brick built here was the Diocese's first seminary. It opened in 1838 with Vincentian Fathers staffing it. And Vincentians had charge of the church.

In 1855, fire destroyed the seminary. Within a short time the present church was built. The Vincentians retired from the parish in 1858, and the Diocesan clergy took over.

Earlier, in 1825, Sisters of Loretto had opened a school but were not versed in the French language, and Sisters of the Sacred Heart from Convention La., took over their work. The Sisters of Mount Carmel succeeded them.

A large relic of St. Faustine came to the parish in 1872.

The Rev. John A. Francon, who had served as pastor 36 years, retired in 1948 and died two years later. He was succeeded by the Rev. Henry Hollemann, who built the present rectory, renovated the church, improved the cemetery and made other improvements.

He was succeeded in 1953 by Father Rousso, and in 1955 Father Weber became pastor.

Father McLaughlin became pastor in 1956, and the late Father Clayton Breaux was administrator for a short period in 1956 when Father McLaughlin was ill. The Rev. Charles A. Speaker became pastor in 1962.

On Nov. 9, 1961, the day after his installation as Bishop of Baton Rouge, and establishment of the Diocese of Baton Rouge, Bishop Tracy accompanied the Most Rev. Egidio Vagnozzi, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, on a visit to the parish.

Hurricanes Hilda and Betsy caused great damage to the church and parish hall.

Father Vavasseur became administrator in 1966, and he began repair work on the church.

Renovation included re-orientation of the interior in accordance with dictated of Vatican Council II, at a cost of approximately $145,000. The church has a new altar of Texas shellstone, new Baptismal font, and new pews. Wood from the old altar was preserved in the form of shelving for the tabernacle and for the Holy Oils.

"Though in many ways the physical appearance of the Parish of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary has changed with the passing of time, the faith and devotion of its people are still as evident today as they must have been in the past, to guide its people through these 175 years," said Father Vavasseur.