



# Bishop Thomas Grady

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## A Disciple of Mary, A Developer of Her National Shrine

On April 21, 2002 an era in Shrine history came to an end with the death of the Most Rev. Thomas J. Grady, Bishop Emeritus of Orlando and the fifth Director of the National Shrine. While Bishop Grady was a key player in the construction of the Upper Church, he was considerably more than an able administrator. Blessed with not only a keen eye and mind for detail, Bishop Grady also had the heart and pen of a poet, attributes which served to enhance this dedicated and truly good priest not only during his years at the Shrine but also those as an episcopal shepherd.

Born Oct. 9, 1914 in Chicago, the son of a police captain, Thomas Grady responded to God's call early in his life. He enrolled in Quigley Preparatory Seminary at the age of 13; five years later he began his theological education at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, Ill. After his ordination as a priest for the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1938, Fr. Grady was sent to the Gregorian University in Rome. He returned to Chicago a year later and became an English teacher and spiritual director for the young men at Quigley. In 1945, Fr. Grady was appointed the procurator of St. Mary's Seminary; in 1953 he was made a papal chamberlain and in 1956 a domestic prelate.

A time zone away, construction on the National Shrine had resumed following a hiatus of almost 25 years. By 1956 the raising of the superstructure had achieved a steady rhythm and was moving systematically towards completion. In that same year, during a investigative trip to the world renowned Shrine of St. Joseph's Oratory, Montreal, (reportedly for a look-see of the visitor service operation) Patrick Cardinal O'Boyle, Archbishop of Washington, came to know not only the clarity of Msgr. Grady's intellect but also his vision of the Shrine as both a national and international church of pilgrimage. The archbishop was impressed. So it followed that in October 1956 Msgr. Grady began his tenure as the fifth Director of the National Shrine.

From that moment until November 1959, Msgr. Grady was the only full-time priest assigned to the Shrine. While his primary duties consisted of overseeing the actual construction, he was also in charge of publicity for a nationwide campaign to build a support network for the Shrine throughout the dioceses, parishes and schools of the United States. Even as the "great forest" of scaffolding grew and the details of chapels

and designs multiplied, for Msgr. Grady, the purpose of the Shrine remained constant: to remind Americans "of their consecration to Mary," thereby deepening and increasing their devotion. The Shrine was to be a "house of God and a tribute to Mary," a structure deeply sunk in tradition, yet distinctive; a church that spoke of America's "Catholic heart."

Msgr. Grady shouldered this leviathan with the zeal and love that only a son of Mary could sustain. During his 11 years as Shrine's Director, not only was the superstructure completed, exterior adornments and all, but so too, a large portion of the interior of the Upper Church, including: 24 chapels, the baldachin, communion rail and pulpit, organ and carillon, seven dome/vault mosaics, stained glass windows, and numerous projects of artistic and spiritual significance. In addition, he assisted in the completion of the chapels in honor of Pius X and Bishop Shahan, and began work on that of Our Lady, Queen of Missions. Further, he participated in numerous liturgical and devotional services, those of historic weight and dimension and

those of daily devotion, not the least of which was the dedication ceremonies of Nov. 20, 1959, for which he bore sole responsibility.

Bishop Grady authored several publications that emphasized Christianity and devotion to Mary, including three books, *The First Disciple*, *Reflections on Mary of Nazareth*; *God on Wings*; and *Echoes of Life*. Throughout his life Grady remained faithful in spreading "the word" about Mary: "The beauty of Mary is that

she was totally open to the beautiful God. There is a marvelous simplicity and clarity about her beauty. She knows who she is and what she is.... Mary, the woman of faith, had said: 'I am the servant of the Lord.'... Mary leaves with each of us a challenge: be a person of faith."

A true shepherd and "person of faith," Grady's achievements were many. Yet, the one for which he will most be remembered, at least here in Washington, D.C., is that as the "builder" of the superstructure of the National Shrine of the Immaculate

Conception. In October 1959, one month before the dedication of the Shrine, in an article for *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, Msgr. Grady wrote: "As time passes... the meaning of the Shrine will become ever more profoundly true. As decades pass, the Shrine will age gracefully as a building. In time, the architecture will mingle with the symbol.... It will be part of America. It will be, caught up into stone, an expression of... love and trust.... It will stand older than some of the states of the Union, holding communion both with its own past and also with the people it newly embraces.... Nov. 20 [1959] its doors will swing open and history will walk in."

