

Smudging Ceremony

Geraldine M. Rohling, Ph.D., M.A.Ed
Archivist-Curator

Exactly one month before the September visit of Pope Francis and the canonization of Fray Junípero Serra, the National Shrine celebrated a Smudging Ceremony on August 23, 2015. This ceremony was to honor and celebrate the contributions and gifts which the Native Americans have brought to the Universal Church, through the evangelization of the missionaries.

For centuries Native Americans throughout North America have traditionally practiced the ceremonial ritual known as smudging, a purification ceremony that spiritually cleanses persons and places. Different tribes use different plants for the ritual such as cedar, sage, or sweet grass. Each plant is considered a sacred medicine. Cedar, the most commonly used plant, was used in this ceremony. The purifying capacity of the herb gave the air a sweet fragrance, as if a breeze from the Great Plains had passed through the Upper Church.

The ceremony was conducted by Deacon Roy Callison, Coordinator of American Indian Catholic Outreach for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, and his wife Susan. Deacon Roy is a member of the Wolf Clan of the Cherokee and a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. In addition, he is a member of the Redbird Ceremonial Stomp Dance Ground, the oldest Cherokee ceremonial dance ground in the Cherokee Nation, established not long after the Cherokee came to Oklahoma on the Trail Of Tears (1838-1839).

The smudging ritual began with a small amount of fire coals placed in a seashell. Then, cedar was sprinkled on the coals. Deacon Roy began by facing east and gently fanning the

cedar smoke using an eagle feather and reciting the purification prayer. Susan prayed aloud the appropriate *Prayer in the Four Directions* from the lectern in the chancel. The smoke rising from the burning cedar carried the prayers of the people to the Creator. The rite continued full circle, with a pause at each compass point, where each specific prayer was offered. Afterwards, Deacon Roy stood in front of the people, holding the shell and eagle feather, and prayed the final prayer in Cherokee, while smudging the assembly.

The ceremony was followed by the 4:30 p.m. Mass, celebrated by Reverend Wayne C. Paysse, the out-going Executive Director of the Black and Indian Mission Office, headquartered in Washington, D.C. Reverend Maurice Henry Sands, his successor, was the concelebrant. Following the Mass, the congregation was invited to Memorial Hall to view the Exhibit of Blessed Junípero Serra, prepared by the Archives of the National Shrine, which included artifacts from the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions. Among the displayed items were hand-made

leather garments; the hand-woven banner carried by Father Pierre-Jean De Smet S.J. (1801-1873), the “Apostle of the Rockies” on all his travels; and a bi-lingual catechism translated into the Choctaw language (1916). ☪



Matthew Barrick



Matthew Barrick



Matthew Barrick



Matthew Barrick



Matthew Barrick