



Episode 4: St. Anthony, Dallas

Thank you for joining us for the Dallas Road Trip where we are exploring Dallas Catholic History in our own backyard. Episode 4 brings us to St. Anthony's in Dallas!

In 1936, celebrations for the 100th Anniversary of the Texas Republic were held at Fair Park. Fair Park, grounds of the Texas State Fair, is an expanse of 277 acres within our diocesan bounds, east of downtown Dallas¹. The anniversary was a big deal and the Catholic Church was invited to be involved through the creation of the Catholic Exhibit. This exhibit, visited by 2 million people over 2 years, would highlight the work of the Catholic schools in Texas, as well as the social work of the Catholic Church (through the hospitals, orphanages, assisted living facilities, etc.) and provide pictures of the development of the Church over the past 100 years.²

In 1935, the Dallas Morning News, in an editorial, lauded the announcement of the Catholic Exhibit with this quote: "The Catholic Church is to take a prominent part in the celebration of the Centennial. The Centennial would not be truly representative if the Catholics had no part. Catholic priests were responsible to a greater degree than civil or military forces in the Spanish government for the bringing of the white man and civilization to Texas."³

Some of the language of this quote may feel uncomfortable to us now, as our language has developed a lot since the 1930s. We know that the absolute, most important contribution of Catholicism to Texas is *Jesus*. However, the manner in

¹ Fairpark.org

² [Prologue to the Future](#), 36

³ [Prologue to the Future](#), 36

which Jesus was brought to Texas did not always mirror the intentions of Jesus when He told us in the Gospel to “make disciples of all nations”.⁴

As mentioned in Episode 3, Catholicism was initially brought to the Americas by European expeditions, starting in the 1500s. Some of the early expeditions were led by Spanish *conquistadores* who were sent to claim territory for the crown of Spain in the “New Land” and to use whatever means necessary to do so. The Spanish conquistadores were oftentimes “charged with the pacification, as well as the conversion, of the natives,”⁵ which, in many cases, resulted in brutality toward the native people who resisted either. This is not to say that all Catholicism in Texas was brought about by the hand of violence, but it is to acknowledge that, in some cases, faith was forced upon others in a way that horrifically violated their dignity. Though there is much to be proud of in the history of the Catholic Church’s presence in Texas, there is also much of our history which needs Jesus’ healing.

Through His ministry as portrayed in the Gospels, Jesus reveals Himself as a healer- a healer of individuals (their blindness, deafness, muteness, paralysis, wounds) and of the relationships between people, such as women and society, Gentiles and Jews. Jesus’ actions are never separate from His nature, therefore, where Jesus is truly present, healing truly occurs. We repent to God for the manner in which His Gospel was tarnished by actions that hurt other people and pray for a healing of the wounds in our history.

When the Centennial celebrations came to a close, the Catholic Exhibit was dismantled and was later reassembled in the construction of St. Anthony in Dallas, which was established as a predominantly African American community that shares the Gospel in the way it was intended to be shared: with open doors.

I’d like to share these words from a member of St. Anthony’s clergy, who seeks to make a home for others at his parish: “For those with roots at St. Anthony’s, come back; we are excited and ready to welcome you again. For those who are curious, come on by and have a unique experience of being Catholic. People come by for our music and our hospitality, but there’s a whole lot more that makes them stay!” Let us, as Dallas Catholics, continue to answer the call to make disciples, in a way that honors people’s dignity and their backgrounds.

⁴ [Matthew 28:19](#)

⁵ [Texas Almanac](#)