



NOTRE-DAME-DES-NEIGES  
CEMETERY

Where life is a garden of memories

# Dialogue

*Notre-Dame-Des-Neiges Cemetery Newsletter*

*Vol. 3 No. 7 April 2001*

## *The Tale of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges (Part IV)*

As the 20th century draws to a close, the numerous plans for the cemetery allow us to follow its growth once again. Siméon Mondou, the former secretary of the Fabrique (parish council) of Notre-Dame, published a study in 1887 entitled "Montréal's First Catholic Cemeteries," which included Evariste Dupré's plan for the cemetery. Dupré was the cemetery superintendent at the time, and Siméon Mondou based his text on Dupre's plan. We learn, among other things, that the construction of the gate was to be completed in 1888 as planned, and that the architect Henri-Maurice Perrault, who has been mentioned many times, was responsible for its construction since his colleague, Victor Bourgeau, the gate's designer, died on March 1, 1888. He also tells us that the cemetery had just constructed a greenhouse in which flowers for family use would be cultivated. This news would prompt Mr. McKenna, a florist, to lodge a complaint.

Mr. McKenna would not be the only one to protest. Superintendent Dupré was to receive many complaints during 1889 about the poor condition of the cemetery—including complaints about trees dying each year, the flower beds being trampled by horses, tombstones falling over and even some tombstones being removed because owners were not keeping up with their payments. During this recessionary period (1881–1900), the superintendent proposed a reduction in cemetery visiting hours, with the hope of providing a certain amount of relief to his overworked employees. At the same time, he had to deal with other problems

of an administrative nature. Dupré travelled to Boston and New York, visiting cemeteries in those cities in search of solutions for his own. He finally suggested several improvements in 1890. As we can see, Notre-Dame-des-Neiges cemetery was not created by a simple wave of a magic wand.

A couple of years later, on July 7, 1892, Jos. A. Beaudry, secretary of the Province of Quebec's health council, inspected the cemetery and noted that the citizens of Côte-des-Neiges were worried about their drinking water being contaminated because the cemetery had started burying people in the northwest section (the area that the Saint-Sulpice Seminary had ceded back to the Fabrique on May 31, 1892). Beaudry's report informs us, however, that the cemetery had constructed a canal to divert water from the upper parts of the grounds to a reservoir near where they planned to construct buildings to house all the cemetery equipment.

Other plans involving this same northwest section of the

*See page 2 >*



cemetery indicate the 1895 tramway route planned for what is now Queen Mary Road, the confirmation of the Champlain Street project (today's Troie Street) as well as the use of neighbouring zones for graves after 1887 on the plateau and 1892 on the flat. In the meantime, in 1894, the church wardens had turned down a request from the Montreal Island Railroad Company for the construction of a line near the charnel house. According to the wardens, nothing was to disturb the silence and contemplative aspect of this place of rest.

It is interesting to recall that the

present administration building, which included lodgings for the caretaker, was designed by Henri-Maurice Perrault and built in 1877. The caretaker's quarters were inhabited right up to 1978. Another important fact is that a request was made to the superintendent for the construction of a new charnel house and for the need for a special charnel house for those who had died from contagious diseases. Finally, we learn that the stations of the cross that had been ordered at Monseigneur Bourget's instigation—and which were removed more than 15 years ago—was created at Bar-le-Duc in Lorraine by Maréchal &

Champigneulle and Company.

The arrival of a new century stimulated the imagination and opened the door to new hopes for future development. Would Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery become the haven of peace—the garden-like cemetery—it had always dreamed of becoming, without having to confront too many obstacles in its path? ♦



**Yolande Tremblay**  
General Manager

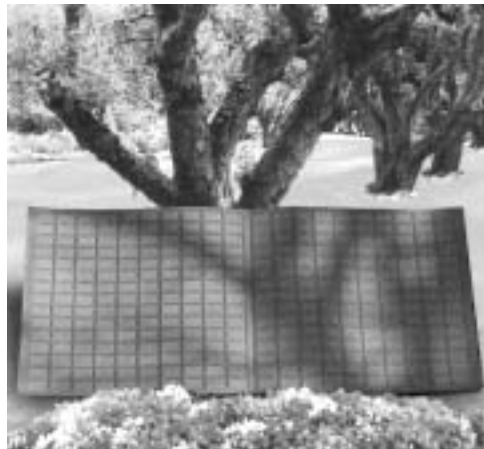
## *A Monumental Work* “St. Peter’s Passage”

**A** magnificent and monumental work—carved entirely in granite—representing an open book with pages measuring 2.6 m by 3 m by 2.3 m (8'6" by 10' by 7'6"). The two open pages have three hundred spaces reserved for inscribing the names and dates of birth and death of those who are dear to us. These names will be engraved on bronze plaques to be affixed to one of the pages of “*St. Peter’s Passage*.”

This is a special opportunity for you to offer a testimonial of your love for a person who is always in your thoughts. Please come and see this monument, situated between the main building and the Resurrection Chapel in the oldest and most picturesque part of the cemetery.

Why did we call it “*St. Peter’s Passage*”?

In the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to St. Matthew 16:18–19, Jesus said to Saint Peter:



*“And so I say to you,  
You are Peter,  
And upon this rock I will build my  
church,...  
I will give you the keys to the  
kingdom of heaven.”*

We can hope that all of those people whose names are inscribed on this “*Passage of St. Peter*” have confided their souls to the benevolence of St. Peter who will welcome them into the Kingdom of Heaven.

The cost of a space on the “*Passage of St. Peter*” is \$750 for 50 years. This is less than \$20 per year to remember a loved one. The monument is a unique work of art and this is an exceptional opportunity.

Our gardeners will be decorating the area around the monument with flowers and shrubs that will complement its originality and beauty with their subtle fragrance. ♦

For more information, please contact one of our representatives at (514) 735-1361.

By Johanne de Montigny, psychologist

## Grieve as you live

I wish to acknowledge the courage of those who explore all the possible ways of rediscovering the art of joyful living and a new sense of direction after the terrible destruction that the experience of a loss creates. Astonishingly enough, a certain part of us that remains intact helps us pursue the question of hope while the other leads us on the imminent quest for human warmth. In the end, it is a question of re-knotting the connecting strands of ordinary life broken by a brutal event that has led to a fragmented identity. How can people rebuild their lives when the death of someone very significant finally takes place at the end of an illness? The survivors are suddenly thrown into a very difficult situation they are not familiar with, and for which there are few if any of the usual points of reference. They have to trade their formerly unshakeable confidence for doubt as they confront the unknown, for the time it takes to adapt to this trying time in which their daily lives have been turned upside down.

The survivors must participate in their own detachment from their social environment to face their innermost being. But at what price? At what rhythm? And under what conditions? At what stage in their lives will people be confronted with the distress, the irreversible loss, the wrenching away of that which seemed to be invincible, indestructible and eternal? Coming up against this cold, hard reality can in some cases take away their ability to function for an undetermined period

of time. They simply stop functioning the way they used to, with the same vigour and spontaneity. For others, incredibly, the initially disastrous experience will turn into a completely renewed life, tinged with what Boris Cirulnik labels, in a bold expression, “a marvellous misfortune.”<sup>1</sup> These are very provocative words for those who come across such a statement during their period of deepest grief. Those who have already undergone the change induced by suffering can relate to them, however, because who doesn't want to believe in happier days after a volcanic experience has shaken the very foundation of their lives?

But if the gift of love, such as the comfort

selling, to a point where it is possible for them to talk about the person who has departed, in a context of personal reconstruction. It is not easy to predict the impact of the death of one on the life of another. Grief first of all imposes the inevitable sadness that is expressed by tears if not by silence. That is why people who are grieving have greater need of our quiet presence rather than magic words or miraculous deeds. That is why our friends are there for us, keeping just the right distance, which is a very simple, comforting approach.

The nuclear family, taken apart and put together again, the social changes caused by numerous and consecutive changes, individualism as opposed to concern for others, virtual communications depriving us of real contact, the speed at which we move at work to the detriment of the actual passage of time, our relationship with non-stop technology, the spasmodic rhythm of supposedly modern life forces us to wonder: “Have we traded a strange form of liberty for a lack of consideration for more human



Coeur de Voh, Nouvelle-Calédonie. Photo Yann Arthus-Bertrand

relationships? Grieving is turning out to be more and more complex, arduous and unacceptable. We are now connected to wires and disconnected from our affective relationships. A spiritual emptiness draws us into a form of slavery devoid of all sense. When a loved one dies, the shock is more brutal given this absence of any human points of reference. Wounded love runs aground in a sick society that isn't able to support its own members. Anxiety, stress and depression

relationships? Grieving is turning out to be more and more complex, arduous and unacceptable. We are now connected to wires and disconnected from our affective relationships. A spiritual emptiness draws us into a form of slavery devoid of all sense. When a loved one dies, the shock is more brutal given this absence of any human points of reference. Wounded love runs aground in a sick society that isn't able to support its own members. Anxiety, stress and depression

## The Celebration of Life

**E**aster, the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus, is the festival of LIFE. Christ died on Friday, nailed to a cross, and he was placed in a tomb. He rose from the dead the following Sunday. Through his Resurrection, he proclaimed life—the importance of life, everlasting life where the transformed body and the soul are united forever, where the individual is filled with infinite happiness. Is this not the guiding force that lays the cornerstones of the hope that motivates our entire lives?

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (I Corinthians 15:20) For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead came also through a human being... so too in Christ shall all be brought to life.” (I Corinthians 15:21–22)

Following Jesus’ example, we too are called to the same fullness of life.

When Christians die, they know they are entering a period of long rest. And the Catholic cemetery (this word means rest) is the best place to mark this REST. It is a place that has more to do with the meaning of rest than with the idea of final “death.” It has more to do with a living place. A Catholic cemetery stands for the RESURRECTION of the body and eternal LIFE, of happiness without end.

The cemetery is a sacred place, blessed for the burial of the

faithful. It always belongs to the local church and is witness to the faith of those who are buried there or who are entombed in the mausoleums or columbariums. It is also a testimony to the faith of their families.

Through their baptism, Christians are not only recognized as the children of God and as members of the Church: they continue to be witnesses for their faith during their entire lives—and even after death. Funeral rites, prayers in the presence of the body (or the ashes), church funerals and prayers at the moment of burial in the cemetery are hallmarks of Christian faith. In the cemetery, Christians continue to call on their family members and friends to come and pray for them and to remember them. They are proof of the Christian faith that everything does not finish with death, but rather that everything continues, although in another way.

By reminding us of our faith in the resurrected Christ and in our resurrection, the dead console us and help us get through our grief, to realize that what separates us is only a question of time. They tell us: “Live, live fully! One day we will all see each other again.” I am sure they are wishing their families a Happy Easter. ♦

*Msgr. Yvon Bigras, p.s.s., C.S.S.*



From page 3

are the frequent results of a lack of deep emotional support. We don't seem to have any immunity against this impoverishment of society's humanitarian bent.

Oftentimes, it is during the terminal phase that physical health provides the ultimate occasion to celebrate one's remnants of love. It is a last chance to put into words the unsaid and the un hoped-for, to talk about love, to accept the inevitable, to share this essential moment of life and to hear the breeze blowing at the summit of the relationship. To listen to the heartbeat of the soul. Touch with your eyes, hear with your heart, speak with your hands. Say almost nothing. Feel the fullness of love before being stolen by emptiness. Seek the courage that it takes for one to leave and the other to stay behind. Listen to the time that stretches out and the time that expires. Let yourself be transported between reality and fiction, between day and night, between abundance and oblivion, between despair and new hope. Be a witness to the sublime mystery of confiding intimacy in the middle of the desert, just as Drewermann suggests in *L'Essentiel est invisible* (“that which is essential

is invisible”. He says that “the initial modesty changes into curiosity, and instead of fearfully keeping oneself at a distance, one always hopes to get closer inwardly.”<sup>2</sup> That is what happens to one partner at the moment of the death of the other, in a huge effort of survival in the face of the work of death. Is it too rarely like that? How, then, can we prepare ourselves for loss other than by trusting firmly in one's own defences, in one's own strength multiplied a hundred-fold by a chain of friendship? By one's own cry, echoing solidarity?

Live! And support the paradoxes of misery and grace, powerlessness and courage, profound sadness and humility. Live! With the generosity of detachment. Admit to the inevitable presence of suffering in the human tableau and be transformed by it along the way. Let yourself fall into the chasm created by the separation. Grieve as you live. Live again! After the conquest of the reconstructed Self. ♦

<sup>1</sup> Cirulnik, Boris. *Un merveilleux malheur*. Paris, Éditions Odile Jacob, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Drewermann, Eugen. *L'Essentiel est invisible*. Paris, Les Éditions du cerf, 1992.

by Joseph Berchoud, *Pompes Funèbres Générales, France*

## A New Approach to Death

### *The Changes in the Behaviour of the French in the Face of Death*

Death is the unexpected child of an impossible union between mystery and reality.

The resurrection of the dead, the Second Coming: words and images worn by time remain firmly anchored in the minds of the French.

This mystery is resilient. It cannot be disproved either by the scientific declarations of all manner of experts or the conclusions of philosophers around the world.

During a recent seminar organized by the *Pompes Funèbres Générales* (general undertakers of France) dealing with the rather suffocating theme of “religious traditions and death” and which brought together citizens from all corners of France, more than half of the guests chose to participate in the workshop with the rather insolent theme of “The Great Beyond.” Whether the workshop’s title was rude or not, the mystery of death remains a true conundrum.

As for the reality of death, there is easy and unconditional proof of its inevitability. When the time comes, it is real and permanent.

And our body, at least, returns to dust, unless of course that improbable day arrives when the supporters of cryonics can demonstrate the opposite. As to what happens to our mind, we could wait endless days to publish even an abstract of the main philosophical tendencies that exist in France. It is not astonishing to observe, at the beginning of a new century, that the average French person on the street is ignoring them.

They are ignoring them even though they consume, with indifference, the daily offerings of the small

screen.

Even if, inwardly, they do eventually question some of these conclusions.

#### **From the past to the present**

Jean de la Fontaine, storyteller, writer of fables, moralist, the man who painted in words the extravagances of Louis XIV’s court, was not able to avoid death.

In his fables, he described death in life’s colours.

“a wealthy worker, sensing his imminent demise

had his children come to his bedside, and spoke to them alone  
Work hard, be sad. . .”

La Fontaine’s worker has, in the end, lived for more than two centuries!

The death he was waiting for, surrounded by his family, described in intimate detail with authentic words, has lived through the tumult of the French revolution, the extravagances of the Empire, the ruthless folly of the First World War, and finally disappeared during the 1960s, not too long after the Second World War. It was as if we had seen too much, had become too friendly with death. It was as if the horror of genocide had erased all traces of serenity and peace that can surround this ultimate step in life. We really didn’t want to hear anybody talk about death any more.

But the less we talk about it, the more it surrounds us. The lies, the unspoken comments, even the words of various religious leaders extolling the deceased person’s

virtues during the ceremonies marking their passing—even of those who, while they were alive, got into a lot of trouble—cannot be escaped.

All of this artifice did not last very long.

Boom! Seminars on death are filling auditoriums and sometimes young people are in the front row.

Publishers are running over each other in a race to print anything that has to do with death.

The French are truly surprising. Observers of funeral services have remarked that at the moment of death and funerals, more authentic initiatives are reappearing. But is not authenticity in fact the true enemy of guilt? This poison around death leaves many survivors wounded—as the psychiatrists and their psycholo-

gist colleagues never tire telling us. Perhaps the commotion created by the idea of palliative care (which arrived at a late date on the old continent), along with the tragedy of AIDS, has produced echoes in the deaf hallways of death?

#### **Today, when the time comes, who accompanies the dying on their final journey?**

Yesterday it was family, friends, the church and no one else.

Today it is essentially health-care workers.

From one point of view, the latter are the referents, the only guarantee of how to die and how to be. They are the inescapable reference points—to such an extent that, sometimes, a family can be made to regret its decisions and to start asking interminable questions about the choices it made for the person dying.

The caregivers are not alone. The volunteers who were rejected for so long are often welcomed today.



# THE FUNERARY MONUMENT

## *SYMBOL OF CONTINUITY*

*Almost all funerary monuments are made of granite. Why is this?*

Granite is stone that possesses strength and durability rivalling that of diamonds. It owes its hardness and its density to the fact that it slowly solidified over thousands of years in the depths of the earth, under the extreme pressure of the layers above it. Earthquakes and glaciers modified the earth's crust, forcing veins of granite to the surface, and that is how man first discovered this rock on almost all of the continents.

Here in Quebec, we have some very beautiful granites such as Laurentian pink and Stanstead grey. However some of the granites can come from as far away as South Africa and India.

Our granites are of top quality, and it is easy to guarantee them for eternity.



What is the cost of a monument? It is within reach of all budgets. You will be amazed that you will never have to compromise quality and originality to stay within your budget.

For many years, monuments were all very much alike—with just the names



and the dates being different. The choice of a funerary monument became a somewhat humdrum experience, an obligation for the family experiencing the loss of a loved one, the last item on a list of painful things to do. But a monument should be able to tell the story of a life and be a witness to the love and respect of those who remain. Personalizing a monument becomes a need for those who are left behind. Often, at the cemetery, visitors bend over to read the stelae on the monuments or have a closer look at the engraved designs. We can almost hear them saying to themselves that such and such a person must have been dearly loved. These words are echoed for generation after generation, as monuments that are more than a hundred years old still attract the visitor's eye.

Our representatives are experts who will be able to help you make the proper choices and express the values

and sentiments you wish to include on the monument. The shape of the monument is also an important factor in your choice: from gently curved to symmetrical, anything is possible. Do you need help? Take a stroll through the cemetery. It is the biggest showroom of all, where the signs of love are blended into an atmosphere of respect and piety. Let your own emotions have a say. We are at your service. Let your imagination run free.

This spring, we are offering a new style of monument—the garden crypt. Those of you who have visited Père Lachaise cemetery will be familiar with this type of crypt. You will soon be able to see the garden crypt in the Montréal section of our cemetery, near the plots of Messrs. Jean Drapeau and Maurice Richard, and in the very beautiful Notre-Dame section of the cemetery. The front part of the garden crypt monument conceals a concrete crypt that can hold one or two casket, which are then sealed and covered by a slab of granite that decorates the front face of the stelae. These particular plots can also allow for traditional underground burials and the burial of cinerary urns in a setting landscaped to individual tastes. The advantage of this new style of monument is that several generations of the same family can be buried in the same location.

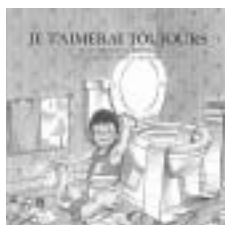
The monument is your legacy to future generations. ♦

**Johanne Duchesne**  
Director, Marketing

**Soleils de joie et Soleil de vie**  
(Suns of Joy and Sun of Life) *Phil Bosmans*

Phil Bosmans is one of humanity's great friends. He is a pastor, a pioneer in the social field and a writer, and these three vocations are evidence of the joy he takes in living, and of his wisdom. All human beings are made up of joy. We measure the true value of our existence against the barometer of joy. We should all experience profound joy to discover happiness and the true joy in living.

The two volumes are accompanied by splendid colour pictures by Frantisek Zvardon. The texts by Phil Bosmans, this wise old traveller on the road of life, open our hearts to the light of joy.



**Je t'aimerai toujours**  
(I Will Always Love You) *Robert Munsch*

This is the story of a little boy who passes through the various stages of childhood on his road to manhood. It is also the story of the durability of parental love over time and through change. Adults will enjoy this book as much as children.

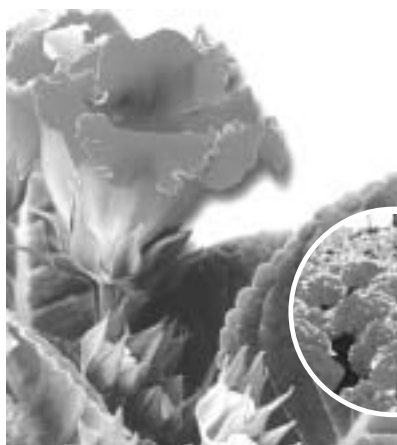
A GARDEN  
of memories

## Gardeners, on your marks!

Winter 2001 is almost over. It is time to think about gardening and sprucing up the yard.

And with the change of seasons, spring cleaning is never far behind. The perennial beds have to be cleaned up and the winter protection removed from the evergreens. The tulips will soon be poking their way through the ground.

Be careful as you prepare your yard for spring. First of all, make sure you choose a



clean-up and a good application of fertilizer will guarantee superb results in just a few weeks.

Come and visit our greenhouses, which are overflowing with magnificent hydrangea this Easter time.

Our experts will tell you how you can keep them for a long time.

**Yvon Pagé**

Superintendent, Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Greenhouses (514) 735-1361

From page 5

Chaplains, priests and lay preachers have become confidantes and not just the people responsible for administering the sacraments or organizing rigid, formal ceremonies. As one of them recently explained, "The ritual is being replaced by sense." In numerous care centres, these chaplains work hand in hand with the health-care team, just as the psychologists do.

The family is also, at times, reassuming its place during the final journey of a loved one. In some cases—which remain rare—they even choose to take a dying family member into their homes. This step back into history is not a general phenomenon, nor should it necessarily be so. In many cases, both the husband and wife work, which

wasn't the case a few decades ago in the French cultural landscape.

The teams of funeral service agents, who for a long time were only associated with their equipment and their rituals, are emerging from their secret preserve. Funeral consultants now receive multidisciplinary training, which means they have become integral members of the support team. This year, in our company, the head office is opening the doors of funeral parlours to "support" volunteers—with the proviso that they must have had proper training and that they belong to a recognized organization. We have made a great deal of progress! ♦

## VISIT OUR WEBSITE

Mindful of offering our clients a means of communication that meets their needs, and in response to numerous requests, here is a brief look at our new website, at [www.cimetierenddn.org](http://www.cimetierenddn.org).

We want our new site to be user-friendly, simple, pleasing to the eye, secure and confidential. Care has been taken in designing it to ensure minimal download times—to suit the needs of those with dial-up access. You will also be able to make certain purchases online.

The site will be updated regularly, and will enable you to find out all the details about our cemetery, its history, and the notable personalities buried there. This information will be accompanied by a number of pictures as well as virtual tours of some mausoleums.

You will be able to learn all about our services: prearranging funerals, plots, niches or crypts, burial, cremation, research about the deceased, genealogy, obituaries and so on.

Our "Events" page will keep you informed about special days such as our commemorative masses, annual mass, and Mother's Day and Father's Day celebrations. You will even be able to make purchases online: annuals and conifers produced in our greenhouses, commemorative ornaments and artificial flowers.

Take a few minutes to visit our site and give us your feedback so we know that we are meeting your needs.

*Diane St-Pierre*

## L'Eau de Pâques

According to Christian tradition, l'eau de Pâques (Easter water) must be collected before sunrise on the day of Christ's Resurrection.

Easter water is collected from a source of running water: from a spring, a creek or a river, but never from a well or a lake.

This water, collected according to ancient rites, has the power to cure skin illnesses and soothe several other discomforts.

It is as if on Easter morning we want to have a tangible form of salvation in the form of holy water at home, within our reach, that we might use for ourselves and our families in moments of distress.

According to popular religious tradition, l'eau de Pâques retains its curative powers for an entire year.

If you want to experience its powers, get up before sunrise and go and collect some water in the forest!

*Francine McDuff*



## MONTRÉAL'S NOTRE-DAME BASILICA

Perhaps, as an enthusiast of history and religious architecture, you have visited the great cathedrals of Europe: Chartres, Reims, Westminster. You may think you have seen the greatest examples of Christian art. Sometimes, however, unsuspected treasures lie right on our own doorstep without our being aware of them. Take the Notre-Dame Basilica of Montréal as an example. You have most likely seen it on television on the occasion of one or other of the many ceremonies that have taken place there. Did you know that you can visit Notre-Dame and learn about its fascinating history?

The Basilica's team of guides offer tours that will allow you to discover this jewel of neo-Gothic architecture, which is more than 170 years old. Twenty-minute tours, in English and French, are offered every half hour. Our guides discuss the origins of the parish, construction details as well as the treasures to be found in the Basilica's sumptuous interior. For those who would like more detail, two-hour long gallery talks (in French only) are available by reservation.

This year, for the first time, the Basilica is offering groups of Grade V students 90-minute tours specially adapted for them. Don't miss future issues of our magazine to find out more. In the meantime, enjoy your visit!



### Monthly masses

All masses are held on Saturday:  
May 5, June 2 and July 7, 2001.

The celebrations are held in the Resurrection Chapel at 10:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

A special celebration will be held on Easter—April 15, 2001 at the Pieta Mausoleum.

Masses will also be celebrated on Mother's Day (Sunday, May 13) at 11:00 a.m. and Father's Day (Sunday, June 17) at 11:00 a.m., in the Resurrection Chapel.

**FREE  
PARKING**