



June 2011

Dear Parishioners of St. Victor:

I would like to express my gratitude to the many parishioners who assisted at the Pentecost parish celebration of His Holiness awarding of the title Prelate of Honor upon Monsignor Perata. It took a few dozen people to make the Mass and reception the worthy events that they were and I am confident that I speak for the entire parish in thanking them here.

Summertime is usually a quiet time for Catholic parishes but this year is an exception for our parish. Most of you reading this letter will have already heard me speak at the Masses about our upcoming photo directory. I cannot stress the importance of signing up early for this, as late attempts to schedule might find all the available slots already taken. If you have further questions about what the directory is, please do not hesitate to ask the priests after Mass or contact the parish office.

Besides the photo directory book, the Jubilee committee is putting together a separate history booklet for the Jubilee. If you have photos hidden away of parish events, particularly in the -60s and -70s, please let the parish office know. We would love to digitize these (that is, you will get your pictures back) and include them in the booklet. Hopefully everybody has had the chance to see the historical display of the parish in the parish hall, which will give a sampling of the type of pictures we would like to include in the history booklet. The oldest relic I've seen so far is a nineteenth century land survey map for the current parish property and much of the land surrounding it.

A lot of people, myself included, are planning to take stay-cations instead of vacations around the country or abroad this summer. Well, the parish has an event for you! More information will be given in future weeks, but please mark the evening of Thursday, July 28 in your family calendars for the parish celebration of St. Victor's Day. This is the third year that we are planning an outside Mass at 5:30 PM followed by a barbeque. Additional sporting and entertainment events are being planned. More information will be passed along to the parish as we finalize the plan for the evening.

When the Jubilee Year kicked off I said that I would occasionally write about our patron, St. Victor. Well, after reading selections from nine books and one somewhat credible online source, it is time to start sharing about the man whose bronze statue adorns the façade of the church and whose prayers we call upon in the Eucharistic Prayer.

Victor, son of Felix, was born of Roman parents living in the Imperial province of Africa, in the city of Leptis (Leptis) Magna in Tripolitana. This ancient city, founded sometime between 1100-600 BC, is well-preserved and is one of the outstanding surviving archaeological sites of the Roman Empire. It is situated on the Mediterranean Sea about 60 miles east of modern Tripoli, the capital of Libya. The area came under the influence of the Roman Republic after c. 100 BC and at the time of the birth of Victor was inhabited by a mix of peoples: the indigenous Punic and Berbers, as well as many Latin (Roman) colonists, most of whom were apparently military veterans and their families. One modern historian estimates that such colonists were at least one-third of the entire population of the province of Africa. St. Victor evidently came from the Roman population given that Latin was his native tongue and the names of him and his father were Latin. Today we think of Libyans as Arabs, but the Arabs did not arrive for several centuries after Victor's death. Likewise, while we tend to think of modern Libya as a desert, in the time of the Roman Empire it was a major agrarian region specializing in olive oil. Even today the deserts of Libya grow crops when water is provided. Through the riches brought by agriculture, a notable pottery industry, and trade with sub-Saharan Africa in such goods as gold and ivory the city grew in prosperity during the first two Christian centuries (which were also the first two centuries of the Roman Empire). This was especially true during the end of the pope's life and in the immediate years afterward. The reason for the burst of prosperity in the era 195-210 AD is political: St. Victor was not the only famous native son of Leptis Magna. The Roman Emperor Septimus Severus (reigned 193-211 AD) was also from the city. The Emperor was of Latin ancestry on his mother's side but Punic ancestry on his father's side. He and his sisters were noted to speak with a pronounced local accent. After seizing the imperial throne, the emperor enriched his native city to the point that it became the third most-important Roman city on the continent, after Alexandria and Carthage, with an estimated population of 100,000. However, in one of the ironies of history these two men from the same provincial city reigned simultaneously in Rome, one as pope and one as emperor, and Pope Victor was martyred during the rule of Septimus Severus.

History does not know when Victor moved from Africa to Rome. It is also unclear if he was Bishop of Leptis Magna. The earliest recorded date of a bishop there is 258 BC, long after Victor had been killed, but in a ruined city sacked multiple times throughout history, records are far from complete. Presumably Victor would have arrived in Rome towards the end of the reign of the Emperor Commodus, the depraved emperor portrayed in the movie "Gladiator." Depending on the list of Popes, Victor was the thirteenth or fourteenth successor to St. Peter: there is a historical dispute whether the first century Popes St. Cletus and St. Anicletus were in fact one person. What is not in dispute is that no Bishop of Rome up to that point had died of natural causes. When Victor was elected Pope, he was in essence dooming himself to a martyr's death.

Next installment: the Roman Church under Pope Victor enjoys external peace, but internal conflicts.

