

## **Holy Rosary marks 70 years of service; 130 years of mission October 16, 2014 (Mississippi Catholic)**

By Maureen Smith

TUCKER – Almost 150 people, many in native Choctaw attire, packed into Holy Rosary Church to celebrate dual anniversaries on Saturday, Oct. 4. The mission is celebrating 130 years of history while also honoring 70 years of service from the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity. Bishop Joseph Kopacz celebrated the Mass while pastor, Father Bob Goodyear, ST, delivered the homily.

The second reading was in Choctaw as were some of the songs used in the liturgy. Chief Phyllis Anderson of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians attended with this year's Choctaw Princess, Meshay Jimmie. A Knights of Columbus honor guard from Meridian and Philadelphia was on hand as well.

Most Choctaw Indians were forced out of Mississippi in the 1830s when the federal government forcibly relocated Native Americans to reservations out west in what became known as the Trail of Tears. Holy Rosary Indian Mission started when the few Choctaw who decided to stay in Mississippi had no rights, no identity and very little hope of surviving as a people. A Dutch priest, Father Bartholomew Bekkers, started buying land in Tucker and offering a place for those Choctaw families to live. Father Bekkers offered each family land, a house, seeds and farm tools, a school for their children and a church where they could worship.

“That was the beginning, the foundation of what is now the Choctaw reservation. The seed of self-determination was planted here on this mission land, in this church,” said Father Goodyear in his homily. Even when the federal government tried to cut off education funds to Indian children, the mission stepped in, offering a Catholic education with no government support.

The reservation now boasts a casino and resort, one of the best schools in the county and a thriving community dedicated to continuing to support native Choctaw culture. The mission also thrives, thanks to support from the current generation of Catholics along with the Missionary Servants. The missionary Servants are an order of priests and brothers founded in Alabama. They first came to Holy Rosary in 1944.

Before Mass ended, Chief Anderson presented two tribal resolutions, one honoring the dedication of the diocese, a second honoring the Missionary Servants. Then, Bea Carson and Sherri Ferguson, members of the tribe presented the bishop with a handmade beaded necklace of the symbol of the Choctaw Indians. Tribe member Gloria White made the medallion using a tradition of ornate beadwork.

After Mass the community offered a potluck dinner featuring local favorites including hominy, fry bread and fried apple pies. After dinner the community had religious bingo, in which the prizes were specific to the Catholic faith, such as rosary beads and images of Mary.

Father Goodyear has served a total of 44 years at the mission, first coming as a young priest. He designed the mission logo, a combination of symbols, a thunderbird to represent the Holy Spirit, a triangle for the Trinity and the Missionary Servants and an arrowhead for the Choctaw.

Father Goodyear spoke of the many changes he has seen during his tenure, but he also spoke of a bright future for the community. “And now Holy Rosary is ours – ours to build, ours to share, ours to pass on to the next generation who will find Christ and receive His Body and Blood in this church; who will come here to find strength and forgiveness, love and support, hope and comfort,” said Father Goodyear.

As a follow up to the celebration, Bishop Kopacz will lead a mission for Holy Rosary in December.