

# History of St. Joseph Parish, continued.

1923 - 2003

## First Mass Celebrated

**T**he first Mass was celebrated in the new church on Thanksgiving Day, 1914, with Bishop Curley present to bless the building. Bishop Curley often stayed at the Keefe Hotel when he came to minister to the tiny congregation, which was still a mission of the Jesuits. Bishop Curley, who later became Archbishop of Baltimore, remembered his Florida experience with affection. He wrote, "I have never gotten the sand of Florida out of my shoes, or should I say, out of my hair...I am free to admit that...my heart is in Florida where I spent ten of my happiest years of my life as a priest." What a blessing for these poor hardworking Catholics to have a house of worship blessed by a beloved bishop.



On Christmas Day, Father F. Padillo, S.J., on a visit to Tampa from Mexico, came to Winter Haven to celebrate three Masses. For the rest of the winter and well into spring, Father Padillo returned to Winter Haven to celebrate Mass twice a month.

Helen Eastman recalls early years living in a house across from this little church. Her home would later become the Chamber of Commerce. One earlier parishioner exclaimed on first seeing the church, "But it's just a little house!"

The population of Winter Haven, which had been incorporated in 1911, was growing, but life was still rustic. Central Avenue was still overrun with cows and chickens. Laws were passed to restrict their access to the city streets because by 1915, Winter Haven boasted 15 automobiles.