

VOICES FROM THE ARCHIVES

Bulletin of the Cathedral
of St. Paul June 23, 2013

SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

The Feast of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist is celebrated on June 24. The statue of John the Baptist by Albert Atkins presents a rough, gaunt, ascetic image, a man the French Canadian settlers in Saint Paul would recognize, “the quintessential image of the missionary, a tribute to those priests whose zeal had brought them to the primitive Northwest territory.” Young John Ireland was inspired by them, too.



[They] were to be his heroes, his models: Loras, Cretin, Ravoux, **even the flawed Galtier** . . . They possessed qualities that appealed strongly to Ireland’s frank, romantic temperament. Their faith had a manly simplicity and directness about it, a certainty into which no doubts intruded and which endowed their smallest actions with nobility and purpose. They consistently displayed immense physical courage, indifference to danger and discomfort. . . . [They] braved every hardship, endured every privation, risked death at every turn of the wilderness trail.

And in the midst of their labors, despite their shabby surroundings and chronic shortage of means, they never ceased to be gentlemen, conscious as they always were of their station and their ancient breeding. . . . Loras, poor as a churchmouse, but always fastidious about his dress; Cretin, the artist performing in flute and organ; Ravoux, author and orator in three languages. What impressed itself most sharply upon Ireland’s mind—and perhaps more important, upon his imagination—was that these men treated a religious calling as a noble cause, as an opportunity for greatness. They did so without affectation or pretense; but still there clung to them the aura of knights-errant, of banners snapping in the breeze, and of armor glittering in the sun. In all that really mattered the French missionaries had strode across an unknown land like giants.

from *John Ireland and the American Catholic Church*, Marvin R. O’Connell