

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 6th Sunday of Easter; St. Joseph-on-Carrolton-Manor

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St. Joseph-on-Carrolton-Manor

5th Anniversary of the Church's Dedication/Depositing of Relics in the Altar

May 26, 2019

Introduction

I find it hard to believe that five years have passed since that happy day when I had the privilege of dedicating this beautiful church to the worship of God, a church built after much hard work, deliberation, and generosity under the leadership of your former pastor, Father Larry Frazier. On this anniversary day, let us renew our appreciation & affection for Father Frazier!

I also take this opportunity to thank Father Kevin Farmer and the recently ordained Father John Streifel, together with Deacon Anderson and Deacon Rausch, with the assistance of the dedicated lay staff and volunteers, for assuming so gracefully and generously the pastoral leadership of this parish, and for laying the groundwork for a deeper partnership between St. John the Evangelist and St. Joseph-on-Carrollton. Such changes and developments have called for further involvement and generosity on the part of you, the parish family here at St. Joseph's. So in thanking my brother priests, in the same breath and with same affection, I truly do thank you for your partnership in meeting the opportunities and challenges that present themselves in this part of the Lord's vineyard.

The Heavenly Jerusalem

On this Sunday when we celebrate the anniversary of your church's dedication, the reading from the Book of Revelation describes the new and heavenly Jerusalem. It is a place of indescribable beauty, radiance, and symbolism on the precious walls of

which are inscribed the names of the Twelve Apostles. But this city of radiant beauty has neither sun nor temple. The Risen Lord, the Lamb of God is the light of this brightly shining city; the Risen Lord, the Lamb of God is also its temple – the true tabernacle, the sanctuary not made by human hands.

Beautiful as St. Joseph Church is, uplifting to our spirits as it is, it is but a faint image of that heavenly sanctuary the threshold of which we one day hope to cross – where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, where the saints and angels, caught up in the Spirit of their love, sing the unending hymn of God's glory. This is the exultant church for which our spirits long.

But so often this vision seems but a distant dream, living as we do in a Church that is at the heart of earthly reality, a Church that is afflicted, as St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, by “external conflicts” and “internal fears” (2 Cor. 7:5), a Church whose mission is threatened by an overarching and aggressive secularism and by the sinfulness and weakness of its leaders and members. No wonder Jesus' words addressed to his disciples struck a chord in us, when he said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid!” (Jn. 14:1) Sometimes our hearts are deeply troubled and sometimes they are very afraid, even to the point of imagining that the Lord has abandoned his Church, that he has left us to muddle through merely with our own wit and wisdom.

Yet, to his Apostles, distressed at the prospect of losing his earthly presence, fearful of being left alone as if they were orphans (John 14:18), wondering indeed what would become of their hopes and dreams, Jesus says this: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Not as the world gives, do I give it to you...” And even though he was going away, that is to say, appearing from their earthly sight, Jesus promised to come back to them in a new and powerful way, by sending the Holy Spirit to dwell within his Apostles. Paradoxically, it is when Jesus disappears from their sight that he becomes all the more real to his disciples; that they recall with clarity and understanding his whole of his teaching; that they find the courage to bear witness to the Risen Lord before the world; and that they find the wisdom to settle the disputes and dissensions that are bound to arise in any community of believers that is still “on the way”.

Promises Kept

On this Sunday, so close to the Ascension of Our Lord and anticipating the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Scriptures seek to reassure us of the Lord's abiding presence in our midst. It is not as if it is difficult for the Lord to reign in heaven and at the same time to dwell within our hearts, our homes, and our churches, and this, in spite of all the scandal, mischance, and confusion that are associated with the Church's earthly mission to spread the Gospel. This is neither to minimize the impact of scandals on the faith and on the faithful, nor to absolve those who are responsible for the current state of affairs. It is, rather, to repeat the Risen Lord's words of assurance and reassurance that he remains with his Church, that he loves his Church, that he is still guiding it.

The same Lord who appears in the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Lamb who was slain for our salvation, the Victor seated at the Father's right hand, the Lord of lords and the King of kings and the Lover of our souls – it is he who dwells within us as in a temple, who dwells within the walls of this church. Moreover, this Risen Lord dwells in our midst, not as an inert presence, but rather in a dynamic and powerful way, in and through the Holy Spirit whom we acclaim as “Lord and giver of life” in the Creed that we profess. Is it not the very center and heart of our faith to recognize the Risen Lord made present through the power of the Holy Spirit in the Breaking of Bread, the Eucharist? And it is the same Lord who urges and enables us to love the Church, not as it appears ideally but rather as it appears to us at this point in human history, and to love the Church and to believe in the Church, whether the times are good or bad, clear or confused, peaceful or troubled. For the peace the Lord offers us is not mere human tranquility but rather a supernatural peace that flows upon our earthly weakness from the Holy City for which we long, the peace that flows from that purest of love that exists within the heart of God, within the heart of the Holy Trinity.

The Communion of Saints

And not only that. If the light flowing from the Heavenly Temple is too bright for us to contemplate, the redeemed, the saints of God, dwell with us and pray for us, as if to accustom our sin-weakened eyes to the undimmed glory of God shining on the

face of the transfigured Christ. Whenever we gather for worship, whenever we pray, we are surrounded, says the Letter to the Hebrews, by “a cloud of witnesses” (12:1), the saints who are our friends, who are rooting for us, drawing us homeward, through the straits and narrows of earthly existence.

That is why today, I have the joy and privilege of solemnly placing beneath the altar of this church the sacred relics of holy saints, saints who accompany us on our earthly pilgrimage, including: St. Stanislaus Kostka, a popular Polish saint of the 16th century who embraced his vocation as a Jesuit against all odds and whose patronage is powerful on behalf of young people who, in spite of obstacles, feel a call to priesthood or religious life; St. John Berchmans, a Belgian saint of humble origins from the 17th century who, in spite of opposition, also entered the Jesuit novitiate, a gentle and brilliant saint who died too soon according to human reckoning; St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first American-born saint, foundress of the Daughters of Charity in nearby Emmitsburg and truly a pioneer in Catholic education in these United States; and St. John Paul II, a modern-day apostle, who visited Baltimore in 1995 and travelled the world over spreading the Good News of salvation. When mention is made in the Eucharistic Prayer of saints who pray with us and for us, please remember relics of the saints beneath the altar. They are visible reminders of a deeply consoling spiritual reality.

Dear friends: Let not our hearts be troubled. Let us not be afraid. The Lord is with us in the power of the Spirit. Alleluia! Alleluia!