

Blessing of New Cross and Church Renovations - St. Margaret Parish

Introduction

I am very happy to return to St. Margaret Parish to bless the beautiful new Cross and other renovations which you, as a parish family, have undertaken and successfully completed. If you have ever added on to your home or renovated it, you know it requires vision, attention to detail, and careful budgeting. Those same qualities are also necessary when a church is renovated, no matter what the scope of work might be.

This morning I want to thank and congratulate this entire parish family, your lay leadership together with the architects and artisans involved in this process, and in a special way let us express our deepest thanks to your pastor, Msgr. Michael Schleupner!

A Banquet Hall

Taking our cue from the Gospel, let us now think of this church as the great King's banquet hall. In the Gospel parable, Jesus is talking about no earthly king but rather God the Father of Life and love. Fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah found in today's first reading, the Father continually prepare a wedding banquet for his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a wedding meal of Jesus the Lamb of God (cf. Rev. 19:7; 21:9ff). And the bride is the Church of which we are the members.

The food at this banquet does not consist of the usual fare which the world offers us. No, the food offered at this banquet is Jesus, the Lamb of God who gives himself to us in sacrifice, as we see depicted before our eyes in the new crucifix that hangs above the altar. And that sacrifice is reenacted and, as it were encapsulated in the Eucharist wherein we receive the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus, crucified & risen. In perfect accord with the Father's saving will, he gave himself for us and for our salvation – and opening our hearts to Jesus' gift of self, we have come to offer thanks! We have not ignored the invitation to share in this banquet nor have we come unprepared; it is the wedding feast of the Lamb!

Ignoring the Invitation or Treating It Cavalierly

In the Gospel, Jesus portrays two groups of invitees to the Father's wedding feast. The first group was on the original guest list but became preoccupied. One tended to his business, another to his farm. Let us pause for a moment over those who declined the invitation to take part in the great King's wedding feast of Christ and the Church. In this parable, Jesus strikes a very contemporary note. All of us know many who are feel they are too busy to take part in Sunday Mass and those who, frankly, would rather be doing almost anything else but this. There is travel, sports, business, family concerns - all of which can take us away from this sacrificial banquet in which Jesus gives himself to us in love. Perhaps there are time in our lives when we were indifferent to the gift of self that Jesus offers us at Mass - or when we had thought of many reasons why we could and should absent ourselves. Friends, I mention those who are not here, not to condemn anyone but to encourage you to invite those who are no longer with us to reconsider and accept God the Father's invitation to his banquet, the Mass.

In Jesus' parable we find a second sort of person, someone who accepted the King's invitation but, then, failed to take it seriously. Again, Jesus' words, spoken so long ago, hit home. How easy it is to take Mass for granted, to come unprepared or grudgingly, to text or check our emails or just to render ourselves impervious to the Word of Life. The Mass should bring us joy but as we mature we realize joy is serious business! It's not about being giddy but rather experiencing deep down in our hearts a love that is liberating, a love that affirms while leading us beyond ourselves, a love that, while unconditional, is also transformative. After all, in the Eucharist Jesus gives himself to us not because he wants us to do business as usual but rather because he wants us to be 'surprised by joy', by a love which changes everything in our lives - summed up by St. Paul who exclaimed, "He loves me and he gave his life for me!" So while all are welcome, no one, including me, should be cavalier about this moment, no one of us should fail to realize the immensity of the gift and our need to prepare our hearts to receive it - especially by means of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

What You Have Received Give as a Gift

How, then, can we express our gratitude for so great a gift? St. Paul in today's second reading offers us an answer to this question. He tells us that he lives in

openness to whatever God wants to send his way, whether that's poverty or abundance, going hungry or being well fed, having what he needs or going without. "I can do all things," he says, in him who strengthens me!"

There is the key to giving thanks for the Eucharist. It's opening our hearts to the immense grace and power of this banquet of the Lord's sacrifice which contains in itself Jesus' victory over sin and death. Yes, the food we receive at the Eucharist is no ordinary fare but rather it is the food by which we become what we receive - the Body of Christ, the Sacrament of self-giving love in the world. And as individual members of the Body of Christ we give God thanks and praise by making of our lives a sincere gift of self, by extending the sacrificial love we have received in the Eucharist to those around us, whether to our spouse, families, co-workers, or even to a perfect stranger in need of our love and compassion.

I Will Draw All to Myself

So whenever you enter this church and look upon this beautiful crucifix, see and hear the Lord's inviting you to share in the banquet - "When I am lifted up," Jesus said, "I will draw all to myself!" May we feel drawn, attracted to Jesus, the guardian and shepherd of our souls, and may we in turn extend his invitation to those who long for love, who seek to be nourished but perhaps don't know where to turn.

To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen!