

Dedication of St. John's

To Monsignor Arthur Valenzano and all involved in this truly historic effort, I express in the name of the Archdiocese of Baltimore deepest appreciation and congratulations. The presences of Archbishop Borders, who recently marked his 90th birthday, and of the other bishops remind us of the resonance of this event within the whole local church. This day will be an important one for your memories: the church is a building that attests to yourselves and to your neighbors that you are a people of faith, ready to sacrifice for what you believe in with fervor and with strength of purpose.

We welcome the leadership of this community: the spiritual leaders of other congregations and the elected leaders, all people who have made personal commitments to the common good. Please know how welcome your presence and your friendship are to us today.

It is good to see so many present representing other places in the Archdiocese, pastors and others who rejoice with us that a new place of worship has been completed.

We continue our reflections in the light of the word of God proclaimed today. These are the special readings for the dedication of a Church, readings to be applied to the real life situation in which we gather now.

(Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10) In our first reading, from the Book of Nehemiah, we hear how Esdra "brought the law before the people." They listened attentively and rejoiced that, on their return from exile, they could thank God and praise God for deliverance and for the law given long before through Moses to guide the people, and help them to rejoice in the Covenant God had made with them.

This building will be a place where God's law will be proclaimed – as Ted Koppel remarked a few years ago, they are not guidelines but commandments. It will also be a place where the full teaching of Jesus, who came not to destroy but to fulfill the law given through Moses, will be presented. The teaching of Jesus, with the pledge of his grace to live up to it, is marvelously summarized in his Sermon on the Mount.

That sermon included the Beatitudes, which challenge us today in our spiritual lives:

- Blessed are the 'poor in spirit'
- Blessed are the 'meek'
- Blessed are those 'who mourn' sin
- Blessed are those who 'hunger and thirst after God's holiness'
- Blessed are the 'merciful'
- Blessed are the 'pure of heart'
- Blessed are the 'peacemakers'
- Blessed are those 'persecuted for holiness' sake'
- "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven; they persecuted the prophets before you in the very same way." (Mt 5:3-12)

(1 Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17) The Apostle Paul stresses a point often made by Monsignor Valenzano, "you are God's building," we together are the Church, built indeed on the foundation of Jesus Christ, and made so by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into our lives. It is a Church that will continue to grow on this very spot, as the Holy Spirit comes to your children and your children's children in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

(Mt. 16:13-19) The gospel reading for the Dedication of a Church reminds us that Jesus wanted his family of faith to be visible, and that its first visible head was the Apostle Peter. How clearly this is brought home to us here in the account of the Evangelist St. Matthew and also in the Gospel of St. John, where, after Peter's threefold expression of love, Jesus entrusts him with the care of the full flock of the Lord: "Feed my lambs ... tend my sheep." (John 21:15,16)

The book of the Acts of the Apostles continues to depict the Apostle Peter as the leader of the Church, the community of believers, in which preeminently he was the shepherd feeding the lambs and the sheep of the L