

Dedication of St. Joseph-on-Carrollton Manor Parish Church

Introduction

Let me begin with words of appreciation for the leadership, participation & generosity of you, the lay faithful, of this parish of St. Joseph-on-Carrollton Manor. What a day of joy as we bless and dedicate this beautiful new home for a growing family of faith! How grateful we are to the planners, architects, & builders for their skill & dedication. We see your vision and handiwork all around us and we rejoice! What a blessing to welcome the descendants of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence - with whom this parish shall always be linked. And how happy we are by the presence of so many priests and deacons! Thank you for taking part in this day of grace and joy. Yet, in a very real sense, we would not be here today without the vision, perseverance, and pastoral care of your beloved pastor, Father Larry Frazier: let's express our heartfelt appreciation!

Staying with the Lord

After all the "blood, sweat, and tears that are poured into the design and building of a new church, we might step back and ask ourselves: 'Why do we do this?' What prompted the Catholic tenant farmers on Carrollton Manor in 1814 to request of Charles Carroll a parcel of land upon which they could construct a church? Why did Jesuit Father Francis Maleve and later Father John McElroy work so diligently with those earliest parishioners in seeing to the completion of the first church on the Manor in 1820? Or why was a larger church - really an expansion of the original church - constructed just after the Civil War? And why have followed in the footsteps of those who have gone before us, incorporating into this new church the painting of crucifixion and tabernacle that were part of the historic, 1870, church?

The most profound answer to that question has not changed since that day when, on the outskirts of the village of Emmaus, Cleopas and the other disciples said to the Risen Lord Jesus: "Stay with us!" ... "Stay with us, Lord, for the day is almost over." We built and now dedicate this beautiful new church because, again and again, until

the evening of our lives, we want to experience what the disciples on the road to Emmaus experienced: the living presence of the crucified and risen Jesus whom we claim as our Redeemer, our brother, and our friend.

We experience what those disciples experienced in the celebration of the Mass. Here in this parish church, many will be baptized, many will be confirmed, and many will seek forgiveness of their sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, precisely so that, like the two disciples whom we met in the Gospel, they will truly encounter the Risen Lord Jesus in the Eucharist and walk with him toward the new and heavenly Jerusalem of which this church is an earthly image.

Emmaus and the Mass

But how can this be? How is it possible after the passage of so much time for us to say to the Lord Jesus in such a tangible way, “Stay with us?” The answer lies in the link between what happened on the road to Emmaus and the Eucharist which will be celebrated in this church for years to come. Allow me to explain.

Like the two disciples who were agitated and distressed over Jesus’ crucifixion and over confusing reports that he was in fact alive, we often arrive at Sunday Mass agitated and distressed: full of questions about our relationship with God and with the Church, burdened by the weight of our sins and our weakness. As we saw in the Gospel, the Risen Lord, as yet unrecognized, joined the two disciples, asked them what they had been discussing, and chided them for being slow to believe. So too, the beginning of Mass, in the penitential rite, the Lord asks us to open our hearts to him and to be aware of all our sins that impede our relationship with him and with others. The Lord, as it were, gently chides us, not to discourage us but rather to console us with his mercy and to open our hearts to his Word.

Today’s Gospel passage tells how, as Jesus walked along with the two disciples, he opened up for them the true meaning of the Scriptures. He showed how all of Scripture pointed to him, beginning with Moses & the prophets. It was like a liturgy of the Word conducted by the Word made flesh, Crucified & Risen! So too, when we gather here for the liturgy of the Word and the Scriptures are proclaimed, it is Christ himself who speaks to us! While we do not expect that Fr. Frazier, like Ezra in our first reading to proclaim the Scriptures from daybreak until midday, we should

arrive here Sunday after Sunday, eager to listen to God's Word. As the pages of the Old and New Testaments are opened in abundance, we should see how all that is written there under the inspiration of the Spirit points to Christ, and more than that, we should hear Christ speaking to our hearts, his heart to ours. May the walls of this church be gladdened by your response of heartfelt faith!

When the two disciples arrived at Emmaus, they did not want the Stranger who had opened the Scriptures for them, to depart. Still unable to recognize Jesus, they said to him, "Stay with us!" While at table, Jesus did what every priest does at every Mass. He took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to the disciples. With that their eyes were opened for the recognized Jesus in the breaking of bread. Listening again to this Gospel, we come to the heart of why we built this church, ...why will we take such care to place in it the relics of saints near and dear to us; St. Ignatius of Loyola; St. Stanislaus Kostka; St. John Berchmans; St. Elizabeth Ann Seton; and why we will anoint and dedicate the altar made of stone hewn in Jerusalem from which our prayers will ascend like incense before the Throne of God. For, *this* is the place of encounter between the Risen Lord and ourselves. This is the place where the priest, acting in the person of Christ, will re-enact the one sacrifice of the Cross that brings salvation to the whole world. Here bread will be blessed, broken and given - bread that is no longer bread but the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of the Redeemer. Here we shall welcome the Eucharist Lord into the depths of our hearts, full of gratitude that the Lord remains with us in the Sacrament of Charity and Unity. And as we reverently place the Body of the Lord in the Tabernacle, we shall be consoled and strengthened as we visit the Lord, full of faith in the true presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament reserved.

There is yet another lesson to learn from the Gospel. After the Risen Lord had opened for them the Scriptures and had given himself in the Eucharist, the two disciples did not linger in Emmaus to mull over their good fortune. No, they rushed back to Jerusalem and joined the Eleven (apostles) in embracing and proclaiming their newfound Easter faith in the Risen Lord. Just so when we celebrate the Eucharist, it is never as an isolated community but rather in union with the successors of the Apostles - with our Holy Father, Pope Francis, with me your bishop, and with bishops, clergy, and faithful throughout the whole world. For the Eucharist draws us together in professing our faith in the Risen Lord and it is that

oneness of faith, that collective joy in what the Lord has done for us, that gives us the courage to go forth and bear witness to the Gospel – to invite those who no longer practice their Catholic faith to return home at last, to invite those searching for truth and love to encounter the Lord, & to say to those “who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death” – *stay with us!* He is Risen! He is here!

Conclusion

As we proceed to dedicate this beautiful church, we once again entrust it to good St. Joseph, our patron, asking him to watch over this parish community like father, just as he watched over and provided for the Holy Family.

Through his prayers and intercession, coupled with those of Mary, Mother of the Church, may we, in this place of worship, ‘... grasp and rightly understand in what font [we] have been washed, by whose Spirit [we] have been reborn, and by whose Blood [we] have been redeemed!’