

Dedication of St. Katharine Drexel Church

I. Introduction

A. Let me begin with words of congratulations and gratitude. We wouldn't be gathered in this beautiful new church were it not for the leadership, hard work, and perseverance of your pastor, Fr. Keith. Let's express our deepest gratitude! I also join with all of you in thanking the parish staff, parish lay leadership, our architects and design team for their invaluable role in bringing long-deferred plans to fruition . . . warmest thanks! And I would like to express my personal gratitude on two counts: First, to all of you, the parish family of St. Katharine Drexel, for your involvement, participation, and generosity in providing a spiritual home that will serve many generations of Catholics. Second, after getting drenched at the ground breaking, I'm happy to be indoors!

B. And what a beautiful new church this is – A church that lifts our minds and hearts to the Lord while welcoming us and gathering us as a parish family; A church that utilizes traditional design and treasures from the past to create a beautiful worship space that will continuously meet the needs of a contemporary parish. Even as we rejoice, let us turn to the living Word of God, to find the deepest reasons why it is right and just that we should give God thanks and praise as we bless this place of proclamation, mercy, and celebration.

II. A Place of Proclamation

A. . . . beginning with the first reading from the OT Book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was the Governor of Judah, who with the prophet Ezra, oversaw the restoration of the Jewish People after their return from exile in Babylon. We can only imagine what joy the returned exiles experienced as they gathered once again in their own land to listen to the Word of God. May that joy be ours as we bless and dedicate this, our new spiritual home.

B. And how intently those who returned from exile listened to God's Word. We read how Ezra the prophet proclaimed the Word of God from daybreak until midday . . . (I assure you I will be briefer) We also read how Ezra interpreted the Word of God and how the people responded wholeheartedly to the Word of the Lord.

C. And so it is we come to bless and dedicate this place of proclamation: Before tonight's readings were proclaimed, I offered this petition to God: "May the Word of God always be heard in this place, as it unfolds the mystery of Christ before you and achieves your salvation within the Church." From this place, the Word of God will go forth, first into our minds and hearts to transform them into the likeness of Christ as we respond wholeheartedly to these words of spirit and life; and then, through us, into the wider community where we live as members of the household of God. Through us, what is proclaimed in this Church must be extended to those alienated from the Church, to Christmas and Easter Catholics, as well as to those who are poor, downtrodden, and alone.

III. A Place of Reconciliation

A. If tonight we dedicate a place of proclamation, so too we bless and dedicate a place of reconciliation, a place where we discover and re-discover the infinite mercies of God, indeed, a place where, as we meet, we are surrounded by God's mercy. In tonight's brief proclamation from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells us that, before we bring our gift to the altar, we must first be reconciled with one another. Or, as Jesus taught us to say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespassed against us."

B. If we welcome the light of God's merciful love into the recesses of our hearts, we will readily see our need for reconciliation with God and with others. We will readily perceive our own deep desire to be freed from grudges, resentments, and even hatreds that weigh us down. Let us then come to this place of reconciliation and to the Sacrament of Reconciliation in which we encounter the merciful Savior through the ministry of priests and experience the forgiveness of our sins . . . peace with God, peace with the Church, peace with those in our lives. And from this place, let us become ourselves agents of mercy and reconciliation, bringing a spirit of peace and reconciliation into our badly divided society, bearing witness to one and all,

including those who are closest, the power of God's reconciling love in our own lives.

IV. A Place of Celebration

A. And finally, we have gathered to dedicate a place of celebration – a holy place where the Eucharist and all the Sacraments are celebrated so that, with our sins forgiven, we might reflect the goodness and glory of God and be brought together as truly the People of God.

B. Tonight's reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians reminds us of why we built this church and how it is being built up – it rises on "the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the capstone." St. Paul further tells us that we ourselves are an integral part of the Lord's temple: we "are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." The construction of this beautiful church is an outward sign of an inward reality whereby we are renewed and built up as God's Holy People, united in our diversity.

C. Let us now understand how we become "a dwelling place of God in the Spirit": '...it is the Eucharist that builds the Church and the Church that makes the Eucharist'. "Each was founded by Christ with a view toward the other. Unless there were a church there would be no one to celebrate the Eucharist, but unless there were a Eucharist, the Church would lack the supreme source of its vitality", indeed its very "source and summit". This parish grows and renews itself by returning each Sunday and indeed each day to the source of its life, the source of all its ministries, the source of its joy. By immersing itself in the Eucharist, this parish and all who are a part of it, take on the characteristics of the great mystery of faith celebrated here. The transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ means that the ideals, attitudes, and sentiments of this parish community are remolded into the likeness of those of Jesus Christ as week after week he gives himself to us. This is how a parish become truly eucharistic (cf. Card. Avery Dulles, *America*, Dec. 20, 2004). This is how a parish inwardly reflects the outward beauty of its spiritual home.

V. Conclusion

A. And what a wonderful guide and patron you in St. Katharine Drexel, in being and becoming a place of proclamation, reconciliation, and celebration. Born to wealth, she found her true wealth in Christ as she made of herself and her fellow religious sisters a gift of love to the African-American and Native-American families and their young people. This she did by providing them with sound formation and a good education, by extending the reach of God's Word, his reconciling love, his gift of self to those who were and still often are forgotten by our society.

B. Through her intercession, may what we do here tonight render this beautiful church a light brightly visible attracting many to a community founded on a Savior who loves us more than we could ever ask or imagine. May God bless us and keep us always in his love!