

Dedication of the New Adoration Chapel

Introduction

Bishop Madden, Msgr. Valenzano, my brother priests and deacons, and dear friends in Christ:

On this Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, I welcome all of you here to the Basilica of the Assumption. During this Mass, the honor will fall to me to solemnly inaugurate the new chapel which has been constructed in the Basilica's undercroft, which from this day forward will be set apart for fervent and persevering prayer for new vocations to the Sacred Priesthood and to the Consecrated Life.

Fishing

The story of how this chapel came to be is truly remarkable. One day, maybe fifteen or twenty years ago, a man decided to spend his afternoon fishing in the Loch Raven Reservoir in Towson. By and by, he discovered that he had caught something. Because of the resistance he felt as he reeled it in, he was sure he had caught a large fish. To his astonishment, however, what he pulled out of the reservoir was not a fish at all. It was a large, magnificent Gothic monstrance – a vessel which is used for Eucharistic exposition and adoration.

The man who was fishing apparently was not a Catholic, so he didn't know what to make of this unusual but beautiful object he had reeled in. But he thought it looked "churchy," so he brought it to a nearby Catholic church. He rang the doorbell of the rectory and a priest came to the door. After a brief inspection, the priest explained that, indeed, this was a "churchy" object – it was a monstrance.

But it was such an unusual and beautiful monstrance that the priest suggested that he bring it here to the Basilica. He did just that. It was gratefully received, and then it was placed into secure storage, where it remained for several years.

Fishers of Men

Fast forward to 2012. Soon after coming to Baltimore, I became aware of the existence of this beautiful monstrance, and also of the remarkable circumstances which brought it to the Basilica. I also learned that Msgr. Valenzano, a few years prior, had designated an unused space in the Basilica's undercroft as an Adoration Chapel, where people could come to pray, throughout the day, before the Eucharistic Lord.

So, after prayer and consultation, the idea was born to enhance and beautify that space, to restore the monstrance, and to make that chapel a place specifically dedicated to prayer for priestly and religious vocations. In other words, using a monstrance fished out of a lake, we will ask the Lord to send us new "fishers of men" - both here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and in the whole Church. And at this time, allow me, then, to thank publicly the Andreas Foundation, without whose generosity this project would not have been possible.

When you enter the new Adoration Chapel downstairs, you will see an altar. Its design was inspired by the side altars of St. James and St. Michael, behind me here in the great upper church of the Basilica. Atop the altar downstairs rests an octagonal baldacchino, or canopy. The metal "shingles" on its roof are set in a pattern inspired by the design of the dome of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City. The tiles of blue glass which cover the interior of the baldacchino and serve as a backdrop for the monstrance recall the water of the lake from which the monstrance emerged - and also the words of the Lord to the Apostles, the first fishers of men, to "put out into the deep." The centerpiece of the chapel, of course, will be this monstrance, or, more properly—the Lord Jesus Christ himself, present in the Holy Eucharist and enthroned within the monstrance.

Finally, above the side doors of the chapel are inscribed the words taken from the 10th chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." That is the prayer that you and I, together with many men, women, & young people will bring in their hearts to this chapel, now and in the years ahead. Indeed, this Adoration Chapel has been built precisely so that we might respond to Our Lord's request for our prayers that he send new laborers into his harvest.

One Good Priest Can Make a Difference

Dear friends, how the monstrance found its way into the reservoir is a mystery; but how it found its way here to the Basilica is a remarkable sign of God's Providence. And yet, there's more. The Chapel is located directly behind the tombs of six of my predecessors, including Archbishop John Carroll, the first bishop in the United States, together with Archbishop Ambrose Maréchal, who consecrated this Basilica in 1821, and Archbishop Francis Kenrick, who ordained St. John Neumann a bishop in 1852.

Many priests have been ordained and sent forth into the world from this Basilica, so it is only fitting we set aside a place in this historic and beautiful church to pray specifically for priestly and religious vocations. You know, the Knights of Columbus have a saying: "One good priest can make a difference." They say this in reference to their founder, the Venerable Father Michael J. McGivney, who was ordained a priest in this Basilica, by then-Archbishop James Gibbons, in 1877.

Yet these words apply also to every priest who is prayerful, zealous, faithful & kind — any priest who is filled with love for the Lord and love for souls — because the priest who acts in union with Christ is a priest who touches and changes for the better more lives than he could ever imagine. Indeed, the vocation to the priesthood is a vocation "to save a thousand souls."

So it is my privilege to announce, on this very special evening, that this Adoration Chapel henceforth will be dedicated in honor of one of the finest priests I have ever known, a priest loved by all of you, and by me. As you will see when you visit the chapel downstairs, the dedication plaque, on the rear wall, includes, in part, these words. It says: This Chapel is dedicated, with heartfelt gratitude, as a perpetual testament to the goodness and the priestly example of The Reverend Monsignor Arthur F. Valenzano, P.A., 24th Rector of this Basilica, through whose faith, hope, and love countless souls have come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, who is here present in the Most Holy Eucharist.

Conclusion

Dear friends, let me leave you with this. Blessed Columba Marmion once said that "the great mission of the priest is to give Jesus Christ to the world." So let us look

with confidence to Christ our King, Christ our Priest, Christ our great Good Shepherd. May he look with kindness on the prayers offered here today, and those to be offered in our new chapel in the years, and decades, and even centuries to come.

Through his mercy, may these prayers obtain an abundance of new priestly and religious vocations, and obtain as well the grace that these vocations be brought to fruition. Let us pray that through many new priests and religious – together with the ones who serve now, and those who have gone before us – a very great number of souls will be added to those, who, at the end of the ages, will hear the Lord say, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

May God bless us, and keep us always in His love!