

In Your Midst

**The Feast of St. James
on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of St. James Cathedral
Most Reverend Alex J. Brunett
Archbishop of Seattle**

Peace be with you!

It is a great joy for me to be here today to celebrate with you the 100th anniversary of St. James Cathedral. It is especially significant for me since St. James Cathedral is the seat of my bishop's chair, the visible manifestation of my ministry to all the people in this Archdiocese.

I wish to congratulate Father Ryan, the Cathedral staff, and all the people of this parish community, particularly remembering those who have gone before us and those who continue to contribute so much to the building up of this community. All of you should be proud today of your accomplishments as we celebrate our 100th anniversary!

One hundred years ago, with the help of a committee of lay advisors and priests of the Archdiocese, Bishop O’Dea laid the cornerstone for this Cathedral—a building that embodied his vision for the Church at that time. Bishop O’Dea deliberately chose this hill for the site, because this Cathedral was meant to be a light to the city. It may even have been intended as a challenge, as if to say “the Catholics are here!” Being Irish, Bishop O’Dea had a feisty streak, and he did not shrink from making bold statements.

One hundred years later, this Cathedral still stands, damaged by a snowstorm and altered by several restorations, but still a witness to the fact that we Catholics are here. Only today we say that we are here in a spirit of service—service to the city and to all who worship here.

Church and society have entered a new millennium. We have endured one hundred years of global wars, mass genocide, a worldwide depression, post-colonial nation building and an unprecedented growth in technologies of all kinds. The world has been brought closer than ever before, and, at the same time, has been threatened with the danger of nuclear and biological annihilation.

Among the more notable aspects of this great Cathedral's history is the collapse of the dome. Today in the center of the Cathedral we have an oculus, a small opening that admits light and warmth. Written around the rim of this oculus, this "eye," are the important words, "I am in your midst as one who serves." These are the words of Jesus recorded in St. Luke's Gospel (Luke 22:27c).

The younger among us might not be aware that when this Cathedral was first built, it had, where today's oculus is located, an enormous dome rising forty feet beyond the roofline.

On Wednesday, February 2, 1916, Seattle was in the middle of an unusual snow storm. The weight of the snow brought down around 400 tons of masonry. Monsignor William Noonan, the Cathedral's pastor, concerned about the interpretation his Protestant colleagues would give to this tragedy turned to Bill O'Connell, who was then editor of our diocesan newspaper, the *Catholic Northwest Progress*, and said, "...now William, not a word of this to the press!"

As it turned out, however, the press was sympathetic. In an editorial later that year (July 23, 1916), *The Seattle Times* noted that not only Catholics, but “...every Seattle citizen felt something akin to personal loss....”

It is as though --- even then --- the wider community had a sense that this was not simply *our* Roman Catholic Cathedral but it was *their* city-wide Cathedral standing in *their* midst as a sign of Jesus Christ serving *them*. As our Cathedral pastor, Father Michael G. Ryan noted:

“Cathedrals, like so many other human enterprises are works in progress, unfinished symphonies... places of worship, icons of the heavenly city, bully pulpits, centers for sacred art, centers for social services, crossroads for conversation and controversy, ecumenical centers.”

The Cathedral *is* all of these and more precisely because it is a place where the presence and message of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and celebrated, where we recall that Jesus is in our midst as one who serves. This is the precise dynamic of Jesus at work through the ministry of this great Cathedral and its bishops for over 100 years.

It was here that Archbishop Thomas Murphy called for a better sense of stewardship, challenging us to make gifts of time, treasure and talent that would change our way of life and make us faithful disciples of Jesus.

It was here at this Cathedral that Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen challenged our world's reliance on weapons of mass destruction.

It was here that Archbishop Thomas Connolly challenged the financial institutions of this city in their “red-lining” of neighborhoods against African Americans and other ethnic communities. It was here, too, that he called for support of Cesar Chavez and the grape boycott.

It was here at this great Cathedral that Bishop Gerald Shaughnessy --- one of the few voices among American leaders --- decried the deportation of Japanese Americans from the West Coast in 1941 and then graciously hosting a reception to welcome them back upon their return.

It is here in this place that I apologized to the victims of clergy sexual abuse and condemned this evil that strikes at the very core of the message of Christ and his Church. It is here also that I call for a just immigration policy that would protect and honor the dignity of every person.

It is as though the preaching of these bishops fulfilled the audacious architectural plan of Bishop Edward O’Dea in purposely building a grand Cathedral atop Seattle’s First Hill, so it faced both the city *and* the world with all its challenges and all its aspirations.

Sometimes these steep and demanding episcopal teachings go out through sermons and homilies; sometimes these challenges are made through pastoral letters and writings. But, always, this preaching challenges us to imitate our Cathedral patron, St. James, who made Jesus Christ known as God’s very presence walking “...in their midst.”

In the quiet, off-hours here at St. James Cathedral, I sometimes stroll through and see our modern-day visitors who ---knowingly or unknowingly --- have been pulled here under the patronage of St. James.

Sometimes, I see visitors who are obviously not Catholic walking in awe as if in a museum. Other times I hear the whispers of Cathedral visitors speaking Tagalog, Spanish, Korean or Vietnamese. Yet, again, it might be a guest from our Cathedral food kitchen drifting in before the beginning of our daily 4 p.m. meal.

Whoever the person and whatever the circumstance, all who come to this Cathedral have their eyes drawn heavenward to its glass oculus, this eye in the center of the Cathedral. And what do they see? They see in writing the solemn pledge and covenant of Jesus growing from his Passover meal. “I am in your midst as one who serves.”

It reminds us, as Jesus did, that our life is a journey. Standing beneath this oculus, this eye, shedding light on us, challenges us wherever we are and wherever we go to be responsible for the quality of our life's journey. If our life is a journey, then those words of Jesus challenge us to ask ourselves whether we are traveling as a pilgrim or as a tourist.

Tourists take pictures. Pilgrims are part of the picture. Tourists come to visit this church. Pilgrims come here to participate in the life of the community. Tourists admire the architecture. Pilgrims are part of the architecture. Tourists sample spirituality. Pilgrims live spirituality. Tourists are often self guided. Pilgrims often call upon God for their guidance.

If we don't realize that this Cathedral is a place of pilgrimage in our life's journey, the yearning for something more will never be satisfied, and those that God calls for faithful pilgrimage will remain forever tourists, never settling down or finding ultimate meaning in life, stopping to visit but going home jetlagged and hung over, carrying only faded snapshots and cheap souvenirs of lives that have not captured meaning or been fulfilled.

The words of Jesus from St. Luke's Gospel, "I am in your midst as one who serves," mark our Cathedral as we enter our second century of service. Our secularized, high-tech, high-touch culture suggests that solutions to life challenges are a mouse-click away. Yet looking back across the last one hundred years, distortions of this same secularized culture has produced the deadliest wars in human history and the largest number of refugees ever.

Like that *Seattle Times* editorial written in 1916 after the collapse of the Cathedral dome, we enter a new century, having the grace of serving people who, in surveying the historical damage of our era, may not sense immediately the presence of God, but, at least, they can sense a loss, an absence, a beauty destroyed, and thus come to know their deepest human need. This eternal longing becomes the basis for inviting our visitors here around this altar to join our pilgrimage of faith.

Why? Because in the way the destruction and death of Jesus on the cross becomes life for the world, God can do the very same for us! God takes the simple elements of our daily life --- bread and wine --- and turns them into eternal food for our heavenward pilgrimage. God's very nourishment --- Jesus Christ --- becomes the food we need for our pilgrimage as we proclaim his future full of hope: "I am in your midst as one who serves."

Such a Cathedral as St. James will be humble enough to know that, alone, it cannot fulfill its proper vocation, that it needs the partnership and *koinonia* of rich and challenging ties and relationships. And such a Cathedral will be confident enough to know it has traditions, it has stories, it has commitments rich enough to be worth remembering, cultivating and sharing. Such a Cathedral may seem far more fragile and vulnerable than cathedrals of prior years, but it will be a Cathedral worthy of its vocation and with the “whole Church to be the servant..., sign and instrument of God’s design for the whole world.”

May our St. James Cathedral always point our pilgrim-way back to Jesus Christ even as we journey forward in service to the world!

Peace be with you!