

THE FEAST OF ST. JAMES THE APOSTLE

July 24, 1988

Mass of Installation

I would never want to engage in a game of one-upmanship with Archbishop Hunthausen, especially when he is sure to have the last word --- but, Archbishop, I just can't resist saying that if you thought you had a large family (and I've seen enough photographs of your family reunions to think you have) --- take a look at this one!!! (Maybe ~~technically~~ they are not all family in the strict sense, but in one way or another, I feel they are...)

In my letter of invitation to my family and friends, I suggested that they plan to arrive a bit early today so they wouldn't end up being seated behind a pillar.

I don't know if they followed my advice or not, but I want them to know there was a reason for my making that suggestion:

I have a very strong recollection of being in this same Cathedral 35 years ago

(I won't say how old I was at the time, but I was not wearing knee pants...)

I was here with my family for the Installation as Pastor of Father Thomas Gill.

And while I remember the event quite well, I also remember that I didn't get to see very much of it because I got seated behind a pillar!

Little did I dream on that Sunday afternoon so long ago that my time would come one day to stand in this same pulpit. It's more than a little humbling, but I also have to own that the view is definitely better...!

One of my favorite stories about Cathedrals comes from the days shortly after the great London fire of 1666 when the famous architect, Sir Christopher Wren, was building the new St. Paul's Cathedral. One day he disguised himself and went into the workshop to see how the workers were getting on.

He found three of them there, all doing the same job-- smoothing and preparing stone.

He asked the first, "What are you doing?"

The man said, "I am chipping bits off this stone until it's two feet by three feet by six -- -- a very boring job it is, too."

And then he said to the second, "What are you doing?"

"I'm earning a few pence a day, " he said, "and it's very little when you've a wife and six children to feed."

And he said to the third, "What are you doing?"

And he replied, "Ah, I'm a lucky chap. I'm helping a fellow called Christopher Wren to build a great Cathedral!"

Helping to build a great Cathedral! I guess I would like to acknowledge right from the start here today that, in my judgment, that is precisely what has been going on here on First Hill at St. James for a long time -- for more than 80 years, to be precise: People have been helping build a great Cathedral.

And it is both humbling and exciting to be called to become part of it at this time.

I'm speaking, I'm sure you know, not of the bricks and mortar,  
the vaults and arches,  
the organs and stained glass

which make up this hallowed and beloved church we call St. James Cathedral.

I'm speaking first of all of the church as the Body of Christ:

-- the countless women and men, living and dead, who have been part of the life of this Cathedral which is both mother church of our Archdiocese and the place of worship -- the home -- of a wonderfully diverse parish community here in downtown Seattle, First Hill, and the western slope of Capitol Hill...

I'm speaking of the building to which St. Paul referred in his letter to the Ephesians (our second reading today):

the living building which rises on the firm foundation of the Apostles and Prophets with the Lord Jesus Himself as the capstone.

Each one of us is a part of that building, and by living out our baptismal call each of us is, in remarkably diverse ways, helping build a great Cathedral.

New as I am, I am hardly the one to be welcoming you or anyone to this task, this sacred mission.

You are the ones who are generously welcoming me to join you in it.

-- For this, I think, is what we are about here today:

a recommitting of ourselves to what has long been the agenda here on the hill and throughout this far-flung Archdiocese--

-- from humble beginnings in pioneer days at the first Cathedral of St. James in Vancouver on the Columbia--

-- right up to the present moment: building the body of Christ, a Cathedral greater by far than any built by human hands.

I have another favorite story that relates to what this community and this place are all about:

It seems that St. Lawrence, a Deacon of the early Church of Rome at the time of the persecutions, was brought before a Tribunal and ordered to hand over to the State the riches and treasures of the outlawed Christian Church.

Lawrence replied that it would take him some time -- at least a day or so -- to gather them up, and he was given the time he requested.

When he returned to the Tribunal, Lawrence did not come alone:

he had with him a large and I guess you might even say somewhat motley group of people, mostly poor.

Pointing to them he said to the Magistrate: "You asked for the treasures of the Church. Here they are!!!"

I thought of that story when I read the passage from the Acts of the Apostles (our first reading today) and also the Gospel passage from Matthew.

In the Book of Acts, we see ~~that~~ clearly that the church is people --  
-- a community of people like us trying to learn and to live out  
what "being church" is all about:

-- they lived a simple life,  
they prayed and broke the bread of the Eucharist together,  
and they shared their goods and property with each other,  
taking special care to provide for the neediest among them.

That is still what we are called to: to community, to worship, to service  
And I might add that these are the very things I have already  
found in abundance in the few short weeks I have been here at  
St. James.

People come first here: God's people--  
old and young, poor and well off, sick and healthy --  
God's people are loved and welcomed and cared for here --  
-- and, yes, they are treasured!

The Gospel passage from Matthew speaks of service: of the Son of Man  
who came not to be served by others but to serve --

-- of Jesus who turned the notion of power inside out by drinking NOT  
the intoxicating wine of victory BUT the bitter cup of suffering,  
and who refused to speak about places of honor <sup>at</sup> and right hand or left.  
I have to acknowledge that the scale and grandeur of this place  
could at times suggest a power trip rather than humble servanthood.

-- But that is not what the Church is all about.

Perhaps on this feast of our patron, St. James, we need to be  
reminded that his mother's wish for power and prestige met only  
with a promise of suffering and a sobering instruction about servanthood.

-- This is something I take as a personal reminded before I  
presume to offer it as a reminder to any of you....

I wasn't a week here before someone stopped me out in front of the Cathedral one evening and, pointing up to the beautifully lit towers, asked me how we justify such an outlay of funds with all of our other obligations and commitments.

I was a bit lost for words (unusual for me!) but I managed to say something about the Cathedral being a statement to the community, and I wasn't sure it needed alot of justification.

And I think that's true: this Cathedral has been making a statement to this community for many long years.

I have always thought that when it was built <sup>in</sup>1907 it must have made an incredible statement to the people of this struggling frontier town.

It must have spoken of risk and sacrifice and, I have to think, of the Irish Catholic pride of one Bishop Edward John O'Dea who wanted this far-from-Catholic town to know that we were here to stay!

The same was true in 1950 when Archbishop Connolly lavished so much time, love and attention on his major renovation of the Cathedral.

It was a statement about an immigrant church come of age.

And today -- today I believe that it is the people who gather in this Cathedral who make the most important statement of all.

Like the previous statements, today's is one which reflects the remarkable and wonderful Archbishop who leads and pastors this local church,

- who gathers us together around him in this place,
- and who calls us, in a most personally believable and compelling way,
  - calls us to be the church
    - not the church of 1907 or of 1950, of course,
      - but the church of this 'last lap' of the twentieth century:
- a church that has gained new understanding of itself thanks to the watershed event we call the Second Vatican Council;
- a church committed to honest dialogue with the world in which it exists, and dialogue, too, with all our sister churches that go by different names but which are also, along with us, part of the Body of Christ;
- a church which knows that its true riches are not in gold, silver, marble or glass, but first of all, in its people: all of its people, especially the poor;
- a church in touch with its own humanity, which offers worship to God in the most human of ways, drawing on the very best the human spirit has to offer in music, poetry and the other arts;
- a church fearlessly committed to the task of advocating for a more just social order and, yes, to paying the price for such advocacy just as Jesus did;
- a church that is somehow like the ocean which washes the shores of this great church of Western Washington:
  - deep in its spirit of prayer,
  - rough and strong in its capacity for service;
  - open and without horizons in its hope and concern for the problems of the world.

This is the church that the Second Vatican Council has called us to be and it is the church that our own Archbishops model for us so well. Both of them....



I don't know how many of you noted the back page of the program for this Mass, but there is a list there of all the former pastors of this Cathedral, including, of course, Father Gallagher who just left us but who is with us today.

It is a formidable list and somewhat intimidating for the one called to be the successor.

But it seems that I have qualified to succeed in one respect at least:

I'm referring to my Irish name and heritage!!

I hope you will pray with me now and in the days to come that I will qualify in other even more important respects (there ARE some...!)

With this church filled with people, I would be foolish not to ask you all to pray for me and my co-workers that we will be equal to the call and challenge the Lord has given us:

Please pray that we will never tire, like Christopher Wren's stonemason friend, of doing all we can to build "a great Cathedral!"