

HOMILY

Dedication of Most Holy Trinity Church, Cresco
Nehemiah 8: 2-4, 5-6, 8-10; Ephesians 2:19-22; Matthew 16:13-19
May 15, 2022

What a glorious day that we are privileged to experience in praise of God and with gratitude for all that God has done in our lives and in this wonderful parish community of Most Holy Trinity. This magnificent dwelling place for God is a tribute to all of you who, in so many and different ways, have served to build not merely this worship site – but *the Church* – the People of God.

While I certainly wish to acknowledge your pastor, Father Brian Clarke, as well as contractors and building professionals and members of my team, this moment would have never been possible if it wasn't for the dedication, determination and, simply put, hard work and effort on the part of countless numbers of parishioners who never gave up on the dream to build this church – this house of God. In the midst of challenges, obstacles, disappointments and unexpected crosses that you have had to carry – both personally and as a community – you never stopped believing in God's promise to walk with his people through the desert and to bring us to the promised land! And here we are today – living proof of God's sustaining grace in our lives. Thank you for your witness and faith!

This liturgy of dedication, is unique and rich in many ways. Because it doesn't often happen, I hope you will watch and listen and soak in the beauty of this powerful moment of prayer and praise.

First, let's reflect upon the Word of God, particularly the Old Testament passage from the book of Nehemiah that is always required for the dedication of a

Church. In so many respects, it's a passage that is foundational to what this day and this moment in the life of your parish is all about.

Ezra the priest gathered the people of Israel together and proclaimed the Word of God. But that gathering was not just an ordinary moment in which the people joined together in worship and praise. It was the first time that the people of Israel had come together after almost 50 years of the Babylonia exile – an exile that began with the destruction of their lives and the eventual destruction of the magnificent temple to God built by King Solomon.

Finally, after a half century of suffering, the people of Israel were allowed to return to their homes. And Ezra reminded them through his proclamation of the Torah that while the temple had been destroyed, God was always in the midst of his people bringing them back to life! ... And God has always been with you, preparing you for this day.

Indeed, that moment reminded the people of Israel that for so much of their history, Yahweh – God – didn't dwell apart from his people in a house made of gold and silver and precious stones. No – he dwelt in a tent in the midst of his people. He was one with them – supporting and sustaining them – and forming them into a people unique unto himself.

Look at yourselves, my friends. Look at the journey that brought you from three distinct communities – Saint Mary of the Mount, Saint Ann and Saint Bernadette – and countless other parishes to this great day and this sacred space. ... Many of you have said to me today and in recent months, “Finally, our dream of a church is realized.” And it has been realized and it's beautiful to behold, isn't it?

... But, my brothers and sisters, this dream has become a reality only because from your earliest days as Most Holy Trinity Parish, you have first been committed to building *CHURCH* – not a building – but the people that God has called you to be!

In today's gospel passage, we hear familiar words of Jesus spoken to one of his closest disciples, "You are Peter, and upon this rock, I will build my church!" The word translated as "church" comes from the Greek *ekklesia* which means "an assembly." Through Peter, Jesus would establish not a building or temple but a people – who would proclaim the good news of his life, death and resurrection.

And that's what you have done in this parish for all of your years together as the People of God. You have celebrated life and called one another to a profound respect for this sublime gift of God. You have shared our faith with young and old. You have fed families and clothed the poor. You have healed bodies and spirits, consoled, buried and converted hearts to the Lord. ... You have served so well the lives of the people God has woven into your own. ... You have *first* done Christ's work – a work that, more than anything else, has created the rock solid foundation upon which this house of God now rests.

Our late Holy Father, Saint John Paul II, stated this reality best with these words that he shared early on in his pontificate. "The parish is not principally a structure, a territory or a building, but rather 'the family of God, a fellowship afire with a unifying spirit,' 'a familial and welcoming home,' the 'community of the faithful,' ... the place where the 'mystery' of the Church is present and at work."

And so, because you have been faithful, we come to this moment of great joy in the life your parish community. In just a few moments, we will celebrate

rituals that are unique to this dedication Mass: the anointing the altar and walls of the church, the incensation of the altar and church, and the covering and lighting of the altar and church. Each of these rites expresses in a visible way the work that Jesus accomplishes in and through his Church whenever we celebrate the mysteries of our faith, especially the Eucharist. Watch and pray as these rites unfold.

All of these unique rituals will culminate in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist – the end for which this church was built – the living presence of God in our midst – enlivening us for mission and service.

Pope Francis reminds us often that our lives as Christians can never lose touch with our responsibility to engage the mission of Jesus and to serve generously and selflessly, following his example. “If Catholics do not proclaim Jesus with their lives,” the Holy Father notes, “then the Church is less than what it should be. ... But when believers share their faith ... embrace the power of their baptism ... and serve with love ... there is life.”

What a joyful day – a day to celebrate our life as Christians and to give thanks for all that God has accomplished in and through this blessed community of believers – yet, a day that also reminds us that the journey of faith is by no means over with the dedication of this church. No, it continues for us all! ... While we have much for which to be grateful this day, this church building will only shine forth as a vibrant sign of love and hope to all if you, who have given it life, continue to live your faith in service of the Gospel of Jesus.

So, brothers and sisters – give thanks – live the love of Jesus – and continue to build the *CHURCH* – the People God has called us to be!