

The Dedication of a New Altar at Holy Name of Mary Church, Almonte
Thursday, September 12th, 2013

CHRIST: THE PRIEST, THE ALTAR AND THE LAMB OF SACRIFICE

[Texts: 1 Chronicles 15.3-4, 15-16; 16.1-2; [Response: Magnificat verses]; Galatians 4.4-7; Luke 1.39-47]

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is a joy for me to be here for this special moment in the life of your parish. Yours is one of the earliest congregations in the Archdiocese of Ottawa. Worship began here in 1842. The parish was erected in 1872. My predecessor, Archbishop Duhamel, consecrated this Church on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, on October 7, 1875 (which explains my having brought his crosier for this evening's ceremonies).

Every church is a place where God is present. Our liturgy boldly claims that "Here God lives among his people."

And yet, God is everywhere. Why do we need a building?

Everywhere is holy, and Jesus himself seemed to emphasize praying in sincerity and in truth more than praying in buildings. Still, unless we recognize that God is in some building, we may forget that God is everywhere.

Our churches remind us of our place in creation. The steeple draws the eye to heaven, where we hope one day to go. The statues remind us of holy people who travelled the same journey before us. The relic of Saint Brother Andre that we will embed in the altar makes the same point.

A church building is a reminder of human life: from birth at the font of baptism there, to the passage of death when we celebrate funerals. The photos we sometimes see of the children who will receive their first Holy Communion or Confirmation remind us that the church is a place of living people.

A church can be a place of rest for tired people. It is a place of community where we meet with others who pray as we do. It is a place where we celebrate the love of God in the sacraments—where we are baptized and confirmed; forgiven in the confessional; married or ordained before the altar; anointed in grave illness or weak old age; and fed for the journey to the House of the Father, with Holy Communion.

The church building itself is a challenge. We must make sure it is warmed not just with central heating, but with the prayer and the friendship of the people of God, so that we become the Church, the Body of Christ. The church building is the space of Jesus Christ's real presence—the tabernacle. True. But God's presence is also in all of His Body, "where two or three are gathered in my name," Christ promised, "there am I among them" (Matthew 18.20).

God is love, and He calls us to be love as well. The Church is the place where everyone might feel at home—rich and poor, young and old, all the sorts of people who might otherwise never mix. It is the daily reminder that God

cares. This celebration of love continues next month when you will commemorate the anniversary of this church's dedication as a feast.

When my predecessor, the first archbishop of Ottawa, came to dedicate your church to God's glory and praise, he also consecrated the altar. Now, more than a century and a quarter later, we are preparing to consecrate a new altar.

As the assembly and altar both represent Christ, earlier at this Mass we sprinkled holy water on the altar and on ourselves to remind us of his baptism in the Jordan and our baptism into his death and resurrection. In a few moments, the altar will also be anointed with Sacred Chrism, reminding us that Christ's title means "the anointed one," a translation of the Hebrew word "messiah." We, too, were anointed in baptism and confirmation, which is why we are called Christians.

The altar will also be adorned with charcoal and incense, which symbolizes our prayers rising up to God our Father.

We will also light a fire on the altar and from that fire, candles—reminiscent of the Easter Vigil, the Great Feast. This reminds us that Christ is the light of the world and of our lives.

Tonight's reading from the Old Testament tells us of the ceremonies surrounding the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant and of how David, his ministers, and the whole

people prepared a fitting place to celebrate sacred mysteries. This is something we too are doing, building on this legacy.

The gospel reading speaks of Mary, whose name day we celebrate today, four days after her Nativity. It is also your patronal feast.

We focus on her visitation to her kinswoman, Elizabeth, in the hill country of Judea, not far from Jerusalem, just as Almonte is not far from Ottawa. Often in the Bible, God chooses humble persons from out-of-the-way places to manifest his preferential concern for the poor and needy so that he may bring salvation to all. God was at work even in that simple encounter of a young virgin and an elderly woman. Both carried in their wombs a child given to them unexpectedly and by divine intervention. Remarkable, indeed startling, saving actions take place, "for nothing is impossible for God."

Elizabeth addresses Mary as, "the mother of my LORD." While still in his mother's womb, John the Baptist leaps for joy to herald Jesus, the Saviour of the whole human race!

We made Mary's hymn of praise, the Magnificat, our own in the psalm response. The Lord, who is mighty, is doing great things in you and in me this evening and day-by-day, as we work out our salvation in fear and trembling.

As Paul summarizes the incarnation in the second reading, taken from his letter to the Galatians, God became man

that man might share in divine life by adoption. And thus, we are no longer slaves to sin. By adoption, you have become a child of God, able to address God by a term of family intimacy, "Abba, Father!" You are an heir of God through Christ.

Dear friends, it is a mark of a liturgical, sacramental people that we believe God's grace is especially powerful in certain people, times, places, and things. These four aspects intersect as you, the holy people of God, ask for the intercession of your patron, Saint Mary, during the Mass, before this new altar in this building, as we prepare to receive the Eucharist.

For you here on this glorious occasion, and for all future worshippers, may the Lord lift all burdens and put away sadness, allowing us to be joyful witnesses of our faith to a world in need of a Saviour. Let us then invite others to come to this church and to this altar to encounter Christ. Lord, transform our lives and our world.

God bless you.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

It is a joy for me to be here on this special moment in the life of your parish, one of the earliest congregations in the Archdiocese of Ottawa. Worship began here in 1842, the parish was erected in 1872 and my predecessor Archbishop Duhamel came to consecrate this Church on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, October 7, 1875.

Every church locates God in A particular place in the world, our liturgy boldly claiming that "Here God lives among his people".

And yet, God is everywhere. A young boy said once to a priest, "Why are you praying in the church?" "Because God is here", was the answer. The boy replied, "But isn't God everywhere?" "Yes", said the priest. Then the young lad said, "Then, why pray to him here?"

This is a good question. Everywhere is holy, and Jesus himself seemed to be more at home about praying in sincerity and in truth than in buildings. But on the other hand, unless we recognize that God is in some building, we may forget that God is everywhere.

You see, our churches remind us of who we are. The spire in the village draws the eye to heaven, to where we hope one day to go. The statues in the church remind us of holy people who travelled the same journey before us; the relics of saints that we will embed in the altar make the same point.

A church building is a reminder of all human life: from birth at the font of baptism there to the passage of death when funerals are celebrated in it. The photos we sometimes display in the vestibule of the children who will receive their first Holy Communion or Confirmation this year remind us that the church is a place of living people, not dead es.

A church can be a place of rest for tired people; a place of prayer where we bring our needs to God knowing that he is near. A place of community where we meet with others who pray as we do. A place where we

celebrate the love of God in the sacraments—where we are baptized and confirmed, forgiven in the confessional, married and ordained before the altar, anointed in grave illness or weak old age and fed for the journey to the House of the Father with Communion given as Holy Viaticum as we were each time we came to worship God at Mass our whole life long.

The church building itself is a bit of a challenge: to make sure it is warmed not just with the central heating but with the prayer and the friendship of the people so that the people of God here become the Church, the Body of Christ. The church building is the space of for coming before God and of Jesus Christ's real presence in the tabernacle, yes, but God's presence is also in all of us His Body, "where two or three are gathered in my name".

So then, it remains also a challenge for us to bring the real presence of Jesus into the ways we speak about the people who make up the church, forgive them and relate to them. The Church is the place where everyone might feel at home – rich or poor, young and old, all the sorts of people who might otherwise never mix. It is the daily reminder of the truth that God loves each of us the same, and is involved in the life of this locality. The church building reminds us of who we are, and maybe that's why next month you will celebrate the anniversary of its dedication as a feast.

When my predecessor, the first archbishop of Ottawa came to dedicate your church to God's glory and praise, as a central aspect of that ceremony he also consecrated the altar. Now more than a century and a quarter later, we are preparing to consecrate a new altar, a structure that represents Christ himself (that is why the priest reverences the altar with a kiss at the beginning and end of Mass).

As the congregation and altar both represent Christ, we will sprinkle holy water to remind us of his baptism in the Jordan and our baptism into his death and resurrection. The altar will also be anointed with Sacred Chrism, reminding us that Christ's title means "the anointed one", a translation of the Hebrew word "messiah". [We too were anointed in baptism and confirmation, which is why we are called Christians.]

The altar will also be adorned with charcoal and incense, which, symbolizes our prayers rising up to God our Father, in the Holy Spirit and through Christ our Lord, the great high priest of the new and eternal covenant.

We will also light a fire on the altar and from that fire candles—reminiscent of the Easter Vigil, the Great Feast—and that Christ is the light of the world and of our lives.

Tonight's reading from the Old Testament tells us of the ceremonies surrounding the transfer of the Ark of the Covenant and of how David, his ministers and the whole people prepared a fitting place to celebrate sacred mysteries—something we too are doing, building on the legacy of the past.

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As Paul summarizes the incarnation in the second reading, taken from his letter to the Galatians, God became man, we might say, so that man might share in divine life by adoption. And thus, we are no longer slaves to sin but, by adoption, we have become sons and daughters of God, able to

address God by a term of family intimacy, "Abba, Father!" We are God's children and heirs of God through Christ.

Dear friends, may your patron, St. Mary, intercede for you and me and all who have come on this glorious occasion, so that especially on this occasion but ever after, we may, through her intercession, cease to be burdened and may put away sadness thereby becoming joyful witnesses to the world of our faith. Let us then invite others to come to this church and this altar to encounter Christ and also have lives that are transformed.

God bless you all.