

## **10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Dedication of New Church/6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year**

*(Is.56:1, 6-7; 1 Cor.3:9c, 11, 16-17; Lk.19:1-10)*

February 17, 2019 11:00 a.m. St. Margaret Parish, Otsego

Father Simon, Fr. Don Klingler, Deacons Gene and Jim, my sisters and brothers in Christ: how wonderful that we can gather together to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this beautiful “House of Prayer”, to use Isaiah the Prophet’s term from our first Reading this morning, precisely 10 years and 2 days since this Church was originally blessed, dedicated and consecrated on February 15, 2009.

Much has happened in these 10 years. You bid farewell to Fr. Don Klingler who was your beloved pastor for nearly 20 years, and who had the vision and commitment, along with the support of this wonderful parish family, to oversee the building of this brand new and much-needed larger church in 2009. Since then, you welcomed and bid farewell to several other pastors over the course of this decade----including Otsego’s pride and joy, Fr. Gordon Green, who wanted to be here but who, I understand, is under the weather today----up to and including your beloved Father Simon.

You’ve witnessed the baptisms of scores of your children and adults who have entered into the life of the Church; the confirmation of dozens of your young people who have become young disciples of Jesus and witnesses to our faith; the weddings of numerous young married couples beginning their lives of love together, and sadly, the laying to rest of many of your loved ones, commending them to the Lord at the end of their earthly pilgrimages. And most importantly, you’ve been privileged to be in the Presence of, and to receive the Body and Blood of, our Lord Jesus in the Holy Eucharist at the thousands of Masses celebrated here, and the many times you’ve been able to participate in Eucharistic Adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, during these 10 years.

And how satisfying it must be to all of you who should be just as proud that, as a parish, you have been able to eliminate the debt of this Church’s construction through your generous stewardship and sacrificial offerings over this period of time. Yes, there is much to celebrate for this Family of Faith, as you trace your history back more than 130 years, and many church buildings, to your original establishment as a Parish. Over that period of time, you have been a part of three

Dioceses (Detroit, Grand Rapids, and now Kalamazoo), and under the leadership of 16 wonderful pastors and many other priests and deacons. Today we focus on the last decade here in this new Church.

I remember so well when I first came to the Diocese of Kalamazoo as your new Bishop not quite 10 years ago. I was Installed as the 4<sup>th</sup> Bishop on June 5, 2009, and it was on July 28, 2009 that I paid my first visit here to St. Margaret. Fr. Don had offered to host the annual "Priests' Picnic" to be able to showcase this newest Church in the Diocese, and I was very much looking forward to seeing it. When I arrived, Fr. Don insisted that he give me the tour first, before joining the priests for the picnic dinner that was going on. He proudly showed me every nook and cranny. I don't want to say that it took a long time, but let me just say that by the time the tour was over, all the priests had finished eating and were gone! So, either it was a very long tour or are priests are very fast eaters!

It is true that Church buildings are very important; it's essential to have a worthy place to gather so we can worship God, sing God's praises, seek His intercession, repent and seek God's mercy for our sins; it's very important to have a worthy place where we can hear God's Word proclaimed ("in season and out of season"), and where we can find strength for our journey of faith thru the sacraments, most especially the Eucharist. The "place" where we gather to do all this *is* important---it is sacred----it must be worthy.

But *what* we do here is more important than *where* we do it. And more than that, *who* it is that gathers gives meaning to *what* it is that we do.

That's what Isaiah was saying in today's First Reading: the "*House of prayer*" on "*God's holy mountain*" was intended to be for "*all peoples*", meaning the entire human race. **That** is God's vision; **That** is God's Hope---that one day, **all** people would acknowledge Him as their God and "*make joyful noise in My House of Prayer*".

But as we all know, as important as our Churches are to us; as important as "Houses of Prayer" are everywhere----we don't live here. We only gather here to give worship to God and to "*make that joyful noise*" to God. It is in our daily lives that we must do what Isaiah, speaking on God's behalf, tells us we must do: "*Observe what is right, do what is just.....being God's servants....keeping the Sabbath free from profanation.....holding (faithfully) to the Covenant*" with God. **That** is what is important, and we come here to this "House of Prayer" so that we

can renew our commitment to live in union with God in all that we do when we are **not** here, and to be refreshed and renewed in our faith so we can continue doing so.

That's what St. Paul was telling us in today's Second Reading in his first Letter to the Corinthians. Yes, "worthy places" and "houses of prayer" are important, but, as Paul reminds us: "*YOU are God's building!...YOU are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you.*" Of course we want to respect this building, and act in a way that reflects the fact that we know that Jesus dwells here in the Blessed Sacrament, and that we revere this space because what we do here is Sacred. But, when we leave **this** building, **we** remain "God's building", we ARE "God's temple", each of us IS a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit! And THAT is primarily why we must treat each other with respect.

We could even go so far as to say that if we don't treat one another with respect where we live, where we work, where we go to school, where we play.....; then what we do here is disrespectful. If we come here and thank God for His Love, and renew our commitment to live in His Love, but refuse to love one another when we are not here; if we come here and repent of our sins, but then go forth and mindlessly continue in the same sinful patterns of our lives; if we come here and sing God's praises, but then go forth from here and use foul language, cut other people down, refuse to forgive others who have wronged us, or hold violence in our hearts toward others, what we do here might be pointless.

That's why our Gospel Reading today about Zacchaeus is so special and meaningful. We know it well, and I'm sure it always touches our heart. We can see that St. Luke is painting a kind of humorous setting for this powerful encounter. Zacchaeus is a tax collector---not anyone's favorite person----and more than that, he was a thief. He was also shall we say "vertically challenged". And clearly, Zacchaeus thought he was being so discreet, and no one would even notice him up in the tree, so he could see this "wonder worker" as He passed by, and no one would be the wiser. It just so happens that Jesus stops right underneath the tree where Zacchaeus *thought* he was not being noticed. But Jesus stops, looks up, and says: "Zacchaeus, come down here; I want to come to your house." The important thing is NOT that Jesus wanted to come to Zacchaeus' house; what's important is the conversion of heart and deeds that Jesus prompts within Zacchaeus. In spite of the criticisms of his own self-righteous neighbors, it was Zacchaeus who was justified that day. He promised to radically change his life, by promising Jesus, and to all who were listening, that he

would give away half of his possessions to the poor; AND, that he would pay back whatever it was that he stole/extorted 4 times what he took. Because Jesus came to his house, Zacchaeus didn't just brag to others about how great he was that he hosted Jesus, Whom he now called "Lord"; no, rather, he changed his life and did what Isaiah had urged: "to observe what is right and do what is just, and be faithful to the covenant with God and His people".

That's what Jesus wants to see happen in each of our lives, every time He comes here so we can encounter Him in Word and Sacrament.

Today then as we give thanks to God for this beautiful, worthy, and sacred place where God makes His dwelling among us, may we all renew our commitment to follow Zacchaeus' example, and allow Jesus to prompt whatever change, or conversion of heart, that we know we need.

Let us pray that we can see ourselves as St. Paul sees us, and realize that "we, who are the temples of God, are holy", and will continue trying to live holy lives when we are here, and also when we are not.

And as we value, take care of, and revere THIS "house of Prayer", let us pray that we will "observe what is right, do what is just, and hold faithful to God's covenant" all the days of our lives.

God bless you, now and always!