

Centennial Mass

5 Oct 2008

The celebration of 100 years is a time to look back and a time to look ahead. Throughout the year we have done both. We have recognized the work of many people before us and committed to doing our own part now. I am grateful to many people who have organized and participated in our activities. We have marked the year with a kick-off mass and dinner in January, a commitment to prayer and charity with a spiritual bouquet, a mass with special attention to our homebound parishioners, a gift to the Hot Springs community in a home for Habitat for Humanity, in the building of a permanent memorial grotto, and now the final weekend of celebration. We have given glory to God by our efforts and are grateful for his countless blessings.

It is fitting that the gospel for our mass gives us the image of the cornerstone. Our own cornerstone has been opened up to reveal a time capsule dating to the completion of the church building in 1910. The image is ready for us today. In reading the history of the parish a lot of effort went into the unseen work of the church that stands here now. Building on this hill offered some real challenges. After clearing the many trees here they discovered a cemetery, some

say it was an Indian cemetery. The work was halted for many months as proper care was given to the remains. The next problem was actually finding a foundation solid enough to support a church. Great holes were dug through layers of slate and red clay. The resulting foundation has varying depths with many rocks added to the holes that were dug.

I imagine there were some who said the work could not be done, that this spot should be rejected. But they persevered and the church is as structurally sound to this day.

One of the most interesting points in the construction of this church is that each of these blocks was crafted right here instead of being hauled in. So with much effort and a solid foundation the church was built.

Of course when Jesus speaks of the cornerstone that was rejected he is speaking of his own body. On the cross we see rejection and in the resurrection we see the greatest of all structures, the very life of heaven. But Jesus was not speaking only of his physical body, but of His body that is the Church.

We are a part of the work of building the Church, as laborers and as the stones themselves. As laborers we look with the eyes of God so that we don't reject the cornerstone, so that we are not like the tenants of the vineyard who even killed the son in today's parable. As stones we are crafted in this very spot

to be exactly what God and his Church need in our own time and place. By the life of our parish and the grace of the sacraments God gives great care into forming each one of us exactly as he desires.

Each of us has a role to fill in the work of the Church. At times we may be rejected, but we do not lose hope. As Christians we identify with the cornerstone that is Jesus Christ and are confident his work will be done in the most perfect way.

We give thanks to God for this celebration; for all that he has done among the faithful who have passed through these doors. We give thanks that he has called us into the family of the Church, the family of St. John's parish. As we look ahead we ask the grace of God to continue building in a way that honors him and eventually leads to the Church in heaven.

I close today by turning to St. Paul. In today's second reading he points the way very clearly. May each of us do our part in following his words. "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you."