

FROM THE PASTOR'S PRINTER

SEEING IS BELIEVING ~ Last Sunday we held the presentation on the plans and renderings of our new church, including a wonderful virtual tour by video. I think if you're doubting that St. John's will have a beautiful church, watching this will change your mind. (You can find it stjb.net under the Future Home tab.)

After the positive response of parishioners, I was wondering what God thought of the plans. While I did not hear an actual voice (which my psychologist and spiritual director said is a good thing), what came to me is that for God, the greatest beauty is not in what the building actually looks like, but what each of us offers of ourselves – our prayers, pledges, time, and effort – to make this a house of prayer that gives Him glory, draws us closer to His great love, and gives witness to His presence in our community of faith to the people of Harrison. To God be the glory, our lives, and our church!

PALMS, PROCESSIONS, AND PASSION ~ Next Sunday is Palm Sunday. It is one of those days which priests sometimes refer to as a *get-something* day. (Other get-something days include Ash Wednesday and St. Blaise Day with the blessing of throats.) We refer to these days because they draw people from daily Mass goers to people who seldom go to church. Cynically, we might think for the latter that they are coming for cheap grace, that is, to be saved without committing to loving and following Christ. I do not know what is in the recesses of the mind or heart of others (in fact, I am not always sure what is in mine), but I think that there is another reason for the attraction to *get-something*. Human beings are not simply intellects or fact and logic machines encased in bodies. A human person is unity of soul, mind, body, emotion, and will who uses all aspects of one's being to encounter reality. That is not only true of connecting with the things of this world, but also of the things of God. God is not a spirit or theory that comes to us through the mind, but the Ultimate Reality who comes to us in ways we can *encounter*. The mark of ashes, the grasp of palms, the touch of candles to the neck speak to us in a way that defies logic and invites us to a deeper encounter with the Lord. Sometimes, without even recognizing what we are doing, we search for the

Truth, the meaning of our existence. Like Zacchaeus, who climbed the tree to get a glimpse of Christ, people come for a "taste" of God, so to speak. Ashes, palms, and blessings are often where they find it.

God has given the Church a treasury of gifts for us to encounter Him in mind, sense, and heart, and nowhere is it more evident than in Holy Week. Through palms, processions, a story of love that has never been matched, through the washing of feet, through keeping watch with the Lord, through reverence shown to a cross with kiss or a genuflection, through gathering in the darkness of night as the light of Christ breaks forth, through the washing with water, anointing with oil, and a sacrifice and a meal – all done with ordinary things and quite human gestures, God invites us to experience Him so that we may "know Him, love Him, serve Him, and be with Him forever."

God invites, but does not force. He beckons, but does not manipulate. He offers, but does not foist. It is up to us to respond and receive. For all the stories, signs and symbols of next week to accomplish what God intends them to do for us, we need to actively listen, look, speak, sing, think, kneel, sit, stand, and walk. This is nothing less than praying. We need to ask ourselves why we are doing the action we are engaged in at this time in the liturgy; we need to imagine the historical event (for example, the entry of Christ into Jerusalem), imagining the sounds, actions, feelings of Christ, his disciples, and the people. We also need to connect the dots between the historical event, and the plan God was working out through it, and the meaning it has for us today, and how it unfolds in our own life, and how we are to respond to it. Obviously, we cannot do that in detail with every action of the liturgies of this Holy Week, but if we strive to enter into the ritual, we will find ourselves closer to God. In the liturgy, we are not playing that we are "there" – as if it were Jerusalem in 33 AD; rather, we connect the dots to realize that God is working here and now for us today.

Whether your Holy Week will be in Harrison or on the beach, remember there is always a church somewhere to accept God's invitation to a fuller life and to an eternal life. Don't pass it up! A blessed week in preparation for a Holy Week – *Fr. Jeff*