

# FROM THE PASTOR'S PRINTER

## NOW, THAT'S WHAT I CALL DEDICATION: PART II

Last week, we began to look at the Rite of Dedication of a Church and barely got in the door. We left off with those responsible for building the church presenting the archbishop with the architectural plan of the church. Why would the bishop receive a token of the church? Contrary to popular understanding, especially among pastors, is that the pastor is the head priest of a parish. In fact, the bishop of the diocese is the chief priest (under Christ, of course), and he has the responsibility of making sure that worship in the diocese is properly ministered to in the rites and buildings in which it takes place. His accepting of the plans is symbolic of the oversight the bishop has given in this project. I have to say that Archbishop Schnurr and the diocesan offices have been very good to us in this entire process of building, and I am so grateful.

Then, the pastor (that's me) opens the church doors and the Archbishop leads us into the church, our new home. This entrance is symbolic not only of us entering into this particular building, but also of our intended entrance into the new and eternal Jerusalem, which a church building always represents. Once we are in place, the Archbishop blesses the Baptismal water and sprinkles the people and the walls to purify both the Church gathered and the church building, so that both are worthy of the sacred actions to take place from this day forward. The word of God is proclaimed with the following readings: Nehemiah 8: 1-10, Psalm 19: 8-10, 15, I Peter 2: 4-9, and John 4: 19-34. (These readings are worth reflecting on both before and after the dedication.)

Then the heart of the rite takes place: the Prayer of Dedication and the Anointings. It begins with the Litany of the Saints. How appropriate it is for us to invoke our grandfathers and mothers in the faith, since they intercede for us before the throne of God, and have joined with us at every Eucharist in the Communion of Saints. The Prayer of Dedication is prayed by the bishop, recalling the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ, and the city on the mountain top. He asks for blessings upon this building and altar, the center of all worship, for here the Church, in obedience to the command of Christ to "Do this in memory of Me," has Christ's Paschal Mystery made present, and we are nourished with the Body and Blood

of the Crucified and Risen Christ. The bishop then generously anoints the altar with sacred Chrism, in which the Holy Spirit is present, and which is also a symbol of Christ, the Anointed One of God. Chrism is used to set aside persons or things for sacred use. As the bishop anoints the altar, priests go to twelve places in the church and anoint the walls with Chrism. The twelfold calls to mind several biblical images: the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve Apostles from whom the Church received the faith, and the twelve gates of the new Jerusalem. Following the anointings, the bishop incenses the altar by placing a brazier of burning incense upon it. Meanwhile, priests go throughout the entire church incensing the people and the walls. Incense has multiple meanings: it represents the sweet aroma of God's mercy; it represents our prayers rising to God, and it represents the dignity God has bestowed upon what ever and whoever is incensed. Following this, the altar candles, the Paschal Candle, and the dedication candles (four candles on the walls of church) are lit in preparation of the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is celebrated for the first time and is the reason for the dedication of the Church, for the Mass is the source and summit of our life in Christ. It is here that those born of water and the Spirit are continually nourished with the Body of Christ and sealed anew in the Blood of Christ. It is in the Mass that we hand ourselves over to the Father in union with Christ in the new and eternal sacrifice of Calvary made present to us. It is in these sacred actions, in this sacred place that we become, as Saint Augustine says, what we receive, that is, Christ Himself. Following the distribution of Communion, the Holy Eucharist is taken to the tabernacle in a procession through the Church, and is incensed before being placed in the tabernacle, where it is reserved for the sick. Then, following the Mass, we go forth to celebrate at a reception.

To participate in this awe-inspiring rite is a once-in-a-lifetime privilege. To participate in the Liturgy forms us. This liturgy can bring each of us to understand who we are and what we are about as children of God. May we open our hearts to be drawn more deeply into the life of Christ.

Blessings – Fr. Jeff