

Homily
Dedication of Holy Cross Church
March 20, 2025

“Truly the Lord is in this place ... How awesome is this shrine. This is nothing but an abode of God, the gateway to heaven.” These words spoken by Jacob in the Book of Genesis give us a sense of what is happening here today. As a parish family, we have come together to dedicate this new church so that it truly will be the awesome shrine of our Lord, the dwelling place of God, and the gateway to heaven. This is a joyful day for Holy Cross parish – after many years of planning and toil, you finally will have your church, your spiritual home. And to all of you – Fr. Ackerman, brother priests and deacons, staff and all the faithful of Holy Cross - congratulations for this great accomplishment, and I am happy to say, “Welcome home.”

Tonight it's worth reflecting a bit on the Holy Cross of our Lord, which is the name of your parish and this new church. The image of the cross is all around us, in the crucifix, in the altar, in the mosaic at the baptismal font, and in the stations. Even the church itself is in the shape of the cross. The cross is at the heart of our faith, because it was on the cross that Jesus achieved our salvation. The rough wood of the cross was originally meant to be a sign of defeat, but in Christ, the Holy Cross is a sign of victory and joy. Paul says, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This church, dedicated to the Holy Cross of our Lord, should be a constant reminder to us of his saving death, but also his glorious resurrection. We are a new creation, a new people because Christ has poured out his life for us on the cross, the Holy Cross.

You'll notice too that there are twelve crosses mounted on the walls, places where the walls will be anointed with Chrism, and where candles will be lit. Remember that Chrism is the holy oil used for baptism, and confirmation, and ordination. It is a sign of consecration – the one who is anointed with Chrism is set apart, consecrated by God, made holy by God's own anointing. So why do we anoint these walls, this building? Because it too is consecrated by God. It will no longer be just another large meeting place or event center, a place where any big activity could be held. This church will now be consecrated, set apart, as a temple of the Lord, the awesome shrine that Jacob spoke of, the house of God, the gateway to heaven. Never forget that this place is sacred, a sacramental image and foreshadowing of God's own dwelling in heaven. It is a place where heaven comes down and touches the earth.

But the most important part of this ritual will be the anointing of the altar. A Catholic church can do without many things: pews, stained glass, statues, stations. But it cannot do without an altar. The altar is the centerpiece of every Catholic church, because it is that place where the sacrifice of Christ is celebrated. It is actually a symbol of Christ himself. Upon the altar, we celebrate the eternal sacrifice of Jesus in the Mass, and under the forms of bread and wine, we receive his Body and Blood. We are made one with him and formed as his Church. Once again, this is not merely a table, or a slab of stone, but the sacred altar where sacrifice of the Lamb of God is offered to take away the sins of the world. We anoint it, we clothe it in pure white, and we adorn it with lights for the One who is the Light of the World.

This church, this holy place is certainly a sign for all of us of God's presence. But obviously, it

serves no purpose unless it is filled with you, the faithful, and even with those who are just seeking. The Church with a capital C is more than buildings. As Paul tells us, it is the Body of Christ, and we are all members of that body, spiritually united to Christ the Head, and to one another. The Church is the People of God, and we are members of that people, that family gathered together in worship around our Lord. So yes, this church building is a sign of Christ's presence, but you, the People of God, will make that sign come alive. As we heard in our second reading, "You are God's building." Looking at a church in his time many centuries ago, St. Augustine said, "We see here the finished product of stone and wood; so too your lives should reveal the handiwork of God's grace."

And that means that you, the people of Holy Cross, have a mission. With this beautiful new church, this house of God, you have a mission every day to build up the Church, the family of God, not just within these walls, but beyond them too. In fact, this new church is not a fortress where we retreat and hide, but a launch pad for sharing the beautiful gift of our faith in Jesus Christ with others. Jesus said to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it." In other words, this Church that Jesus has built is not on defense; we are on the offense, and the abode of the enemy cannot hold us back. You, my friends, are now the largest parish in our diocese. You now have one of the most prominent churches in our state – it can be seen for miles. Our Lord is blessing you in remarkable ways, especially through his Holy Word and through the Eucharist in this holy place. But he is also forming you as his missionary disciples and sending you forth to proclaim with your lives the good news of Christ, who died on the Holy Cross and now lives forever. Our world needs Jesus now more than ever. May this church and all the faithful who call it their home be a living sign of Jesus Christ to everyone who sees it.