

Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

26 Pentecost
November 13, 2005
Fr Bill McGinty

“Bring Home the Monastery”

Every year I am mandated to give one sermon in November on Stewardship. It is a sermon that I look forward to, because it reminds me why Jesus gathered men and women around him, who he called his disciples. After the miracle of the loaves and fishes, Jesus taught the crowds: “unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you cannot have life in you, but if you do, you will have life eternal.”

The crowds left him, and Jesus turned to his disciples and said;” will you too go away?” But Peter, speaking for all of them replied: “Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Peter’s words are the words of stewardship. We, you and I, have thrown in our lot with Jesus Christ. Other people seek earthly rewards, they build empires and businesses, own large estates and seek power. For you and I, none of that is true. And on our Stewardship Pledge Drive Sunday, we gather to tell our Christ:

“Lord, we believe in you. Though all others run away, we will not. What we have we give you, in the knowledge that in placing our hand in your hand, we participate in your salvation for all men.”

This is our commitment; that we will stay the course and finish the race, seeking nothing for ourselves, but happy and proud to be disciples of the Son of God.

My faith story began in Ireland some forty-five years ago. My brother, John and I were around ten and twelve. One gray summer’s day we had gone fishing down on the rugged coast of County Donegal. An old farmer had told us of a great fishing spot, where the rocks ran out into the sea. It was next to a giant stack. Under this great rock, he told us, was a cave, but it was difficult to get to because the tide rushed in one side and out the other. We were determined to get into the cave, so leaving our fishing tackle on the beach we waded waist deep till we got into the cave. The tide was powerful and thank God our parents didn’t get to know what we were up to. . What we were looking for was a rock in the cave that looked like a “wishing chair.” The old guy had told us, that this was “the ancient wishing chair of Malin,” if you sat on this rock and made a wish it would always come true. Ireland is full of old legends like this, magic wells, and miracle rocks, but we were kids what did we know?

I remember thinking: if God granted you one thing, what should it be? I wanted something that would last and something that truly meant something. So I wished to one day serve my Savior Jesus Christ. All day long my brother John nagged me to tell him what I wished for, but I wouldn’t tell him. It was the only secret I ever kept:

“That secret came true a long time ago, it has never made me wealthy, but it has given me riches. Like me, your call to discipleship and stewardship today is never going to make you

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wealthy, but it will make you rich. We know that because Jesus' words promise us that he will reward us tenfold in this life and eternally in the world to come.

One of the people who have taught me so much about stewardship is our own Franklyn Hunter, who lies in a hospital bed in Ireland right at this moment.

Franklin always says that stewardship is like a great marriage. He should know, for he was married for sixty years. Like a marriage it is a covenant that we make with God. Marriage is a risky business. You take all that you have, all that you are, all the love you can muster, and with your heart you place it in the hands of someone else. Someone you trust. Today our Pledge Drive calls for us to trust; trust in our God and place our well-being in his hands.

In a sense, although this is Pledge Drive Sunday, our Pledge Drive this year really took place nine months ago when the Bishop rose from his sick bed and drove 100 miles north to tell us "Yes" in answer to our 'White Paper' request. ON that day, we entered into an agreement with him to grow this Paris and to invest our futures in the Lord's work.

As I look back on the last two years there is a discernable spirituality developing in this place. It begins here, in this building with our Eucharist, which draws us all together. It is at the Eucharist that we place all our hopes, fears and needs. It is to the Eucharist we turn when things are not good and to the Eucharist we return, to celebrate life's joys. I see as I look down the church a great hunger for prayer and a deeper spirituality. Prayer shawls and prayer beads, healing rooms and healing services, discussions on books and religious topics are symptomatic of a Spirit that is going out from this place into every facet of our lives.

There is a sense in which we have become and are becoming the "monastery in the world." You see a monastery is a refuge of prayer and tranquility, where people seek God more closely. It follows the cycle of Jesus life from his birth to his death in its day to day living. It is a tangible witness to the Gospel story. We all need some monastery in our lives, for we all need to find that quiet space, where we can talk to God and let him in. 'Bringing the monastery' into the world should be an oxymoron! But in our fast paced lifestyle we all need a little solitude and a little peace. It is there that we find ourselves feeling god's presence; feeling dependent; feeling that we have come home to him. In this old Cobblestone church we can do that. We have brought the tranquility of the monastery into our midst. It has become our community, our center, our place to restore our energy for the week, before out we go again to battle the world, build family and fulfill our commitments. 'Bring home the monastery', and we bring to our lives an inner life of prayer, contemplation and a sense that we belong to this spiritual family of the parish.

This is what Jesus surely meant by building the kingdom of heaven right here on earth. We take his words, we make them our own, and we live them out. But as I look around I see that that is not enough for some of you. You feel that you have to take those words and share them with others; be it Food pantry, or Cloak Closet, Prison Ministry or Soup Kitchen, Shut-ins or Hospital.

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Something is happening here that we need to own. We are not just transforming our own community by our outreach. God's word and Jesus' salvation is transforming us. We are awaking to the realization that making the Gospel come alive in this place, is dangerous stuff. We are dealing with anything human here. We are dabbling with the supernatural, the things of God. We are dealing with a Holy Place and the stuff of people's souls. We have asked and God has responded. We have brought God to this place. We have prayed: "Come Lord Jesus!" Jesus is among us. We have said: Come Holy Spirit!" The Spirit is here in all we do and say and try. Here on this corner of Fifth and W. Catharine the kingdom of God has begun for you and me.

Is it any wonder that in our spiritual lives we have begun to ask questions? From J2A who seek to know more about God, to those who seek to learn about Matthew's Gospel. Already, I have requests to open the Church for mid-day prayer during the week. We have been blessed and we continue to be blessed in many ways and nowhere more than in our healing ministry over the last eight weeks.

Yet, this morning we have and we must be enormously practical in terms of the financial budget and fiscal responsibilities we have towards the church and the ministries involved here. We need to see our stewardship this year as a fulfillment of our commitment to take over the reins of what we began two years ago and what culminated with February's visit of the Bishop.

In previous years when I have spoken about stewardship I have said: "give what you can afford and if possible increase your pledge by a percentage or two". This year I cannot say that.

For today's Pledge Drive is our first opportunity to fulfill the agreement we all said "yes" to nine months ago. In that time Bishop Paul has been as good as his word and the coverage he gave us for 2005 has come through as we asked. He has given us the start we needed. Now it is up to us to take that financial responsibility upon ourselves.

Last year's Pledge Drive and stewardship was very successful but it will not cover the financial responsibility we entered into with Bishop Paul.

Today I am asking you to renew your pledge for the coming year and to take it a stage further. As your leader, it is my job to lead. Accordingly, I have instructed Maryann to double our family pledge for the coming year.

Maryann and I have faith that you cannot give to God but he gives back to you. In friendships alone he has given back to us one hundredfold in the last two years. We invite you to walk the road of faith with us this year and to do it with joyful hearts, for this church that we all love and for all who enter its doors.

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Let this be our stewardship prayer:

“God Our Father, Creator of all that is good; help us to walk in risk, as Abraham walked in faith. Allow us the opportunity to give to you as you give to us. We thank you for family, partners, children and parents and for this growing community of faith and friendship. Accept our offering this year as an act of love that we might share in the saving work of your Son, Jesus Christ; one day to exchange the kingdom of this old church, for the glorious kingdom of heaven.”

It is time to bring the monastery home! It is time to grow this old church as it has never been grown. It is time to walk shoulder to shoulder with our Christ on the road to Jerusalem. What we do today can benefit our children for years to come. Today let us invest in our God, in the sure knowledge that he will continue to invest in us, with his boundless love.

Amen. +

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