

5 Epiphany  
February 8, 2009  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## “Demons Out! Love In!”

What is a church? Why are we here? What is it all about? These are the questions of today's three readings. Why we are here and what should we be doing?

There is a church in Matamoras that nestles under the mountain. Its address is 1055, Blue Ridge Avenue. It is the home of Jim and Maureen Overman whose 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary we celebrate today at this 10 o' clock service. Some of you have been there, when you visited at Christmas, to sing them Christmas Carols. I call their home a 'church' because of something that Jesus said, he said: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst." Well, at 11:00am each Thursday morning, we do gather Maureen, Jim, Donna or Christine and I.

There we pray, anoint, heal, lay-on hands and receive the Body and Blood in Eucharist. From time to time we have other visitors, but including Megan the dog, it is usually just us. We talk about the church, the Cobblestone, the family, the Food Pantry and just about everything else. We do have Fellowship and coffee hour. It meets all the criteria you would wish to have in a church.

In so many ways, over the last three years, Jim and Maureen have been an intricate part of this church, and church family. They have supported so many of our endeavors and enterprises and they have supported me as the Pastor. Many people do not understand, how important that support is to a Pastor. Through every trial, journey to hospitals, at the bedside of a dying person, dealing with sickness, divorce, local politics, struggling with church finances. It is important to every Pastor, doing Christ's work to have that support and prayer. Jim and Maureen have given me, their pastor that support over the last three years in abundance.

Today, on your behalf, I rise to thank Jim and Maureen for the example that they set us all. Theirs is a house of love and warmth, where God truly dwells. As we celebrate with them, '50 years of marriage', we thank God for the love and the years that they have shared. United as husband and wife, we pray for their future, their health and their happiness.

Commitment, duty, obligation and mission are words that we hear and read in today's lessons. They are words that Americans traditionally value. The lessons speak of our commitment to God as our Creator and our relationship to him. "The Lord is the everlasting God, The Creator of the ends of the earth." The first reading tells us that we are mere creatures while God, our God, is a master builder, a great creator, the source of all life and being.

St. Paul writing to the Corinthians is equally keen to spell out that the reason any of us are here, at all, is because of the obligation Christ has placed upon us.

Paul's writing should make each one of us stop and think: "Why am I here? What am I doing in this church? Why am I married to this person?"

Paul tells us: "We are here because of the Gospel. We are here to proclaim it. We are here because we want to be involved with the saving ministry of Jesus Christ and to give that salvation to others." We are here because of love. We are here because of our love of Christ and his love of us. We know that we are a

part of the “greatest story ever told” and we want to take that story to its ending. We want to see Christ’s Kingdom come even a little bit of it. And we want to see it in our lifetime.

Over the last six years you and I have seen Christ’s Kingdom come in this church and parish. We have seen it grow and prosper. We have seen the Holy Spirit at work. We have built it up and we have changed what needed changing. We have introduced a full time Rectorship that has brought Christ to shut-ins, the sick, the hospital and to the dying. We have allowed Christ’s teaching to reign unhampered by conflict and confrontation. Through ‘shared ministry’ and ‘Our true Story’ we have introduced one parish mission, one agenda and one Vestry united in the common purpose of growing the church and caring for a community of faith.

I am here, to make sure God’s people are served, his sacraments are administered, checkbooks are balanced, and no individual ever again takes it into their power to make themselves more important than the Gospel we serve or the mission that we have been given.

Commitment, obligation, duty and service are all words that Jim and Maureen Overman know only too well. Their lives have been dedicated to servicing that holy state that we call marriage. In February 1959 they probably wanted what the rest of us wanted: health, happiness, wealth and the American Dream.

They ended up in Matamoras. That beautiful little resort by the river Delaware. It has five gas stations and a Taco Bell, a Stewards and Price Chopper. But sometimes life is about more than fulfilling your dreams. Jim and Maureen are from Brooklyn they know all about family, community and caring for others. Most of all, they know about love and its power in people’s lives. Everyone they come in contact with feel and experience that love, in sickness and health, they have held on to love and given it to others. Today we thank God for that love and the part it has played in their lives and continues to play in ours.

So, what did you make of today’s Gospel? Jesus goes to Simon’s house and wouldn’t you know it, his mother-in-law is sick in bed. Doesn’t it always just work out that way? But Jesus cures her, and raises her up and she goes straight to the kitchen, cooks dinner and serves them. It’s a familiar story, to every wife, mother and home maker. You are sick in bed all day, with the flu, unable to eat, with a high fever, being sick every hour on the hour. 5 o’clock the guys get home from work. You have to get up and make dinner.

So, sometimes marriage isn’t that romantic. Sometimes married love has more to do with doing the hard stuff, with kindness. Sometimes love is more about patience and tolerance, than hugs, kisses and roses. Today we celebrate 50 years of that. We celebrate 50 years of doing the hard stuff with gentle kindness.

In the Gospel Jesus casts out a lot of demons. It’s the Gospel, there were as yet no liberals, politicians or lawyers, suing over the rights of demons.

There was no one standing up in court at the tax payer’s expense to say:  
“Your honor, these seven demons, my clients, were simply sitting there, minding their own business. Yes, they inhabited the man’s body, but they have squatter’s rights. Then along comes this Jesus and kicks them out without a by your leave, totally illegal, not even a subpoena or court order.

We tend to take it for granted, that there were possessed people in Jesus day; that there were demons, and we rightly believe that Christ cast them out.

So why do we not think people are possessed today and that demons exist? When did we stop seeing evil at work in people’s lives? I have seen evil. I know that it exists. I know that we have to arm ourselves

against it. That is why we have prayer, even prayer against evil. That is why we unite, as the faithful, the people of God that is why the sacraments and the means of grace are important to us. That is why we have Vestries, to protect us all from the power of evil. For the forces of evil do not come with forked tails, horns, breathing fire, the forces of evil are insidiously at work to unravel, Christ's work, his ministry and his church. They will attack all we have achieved all that we have grown. They do not attack straight on; they prefer rumor, slander and deceit. If they can they will attack the pastor, the shepherd, hoping the sheep will shatter.

We pastors have our own defenses. We have prayer and secret prayers. People like Jim and Maureen who offer pain, sickness, love and prayer every day for their church, its mission and even its pastor. They are our FBI and Homeland Security all rolled into one. They allow us pastors to be nice even when we don't feel like being nice. And we will be nice until, as Bishop Paul tells us: "It is no longer time to be nice." Then we will do what Christ in the Gospel did, we will protect God's people and cast the demons out.

But the Gospel goes on; Jesus invited his friends, his disciples to go on into the neighboring towns, to proclaim his message.

Today we follow Jim and Maureen in their adventure, hoping against hope for another 39 years with the same spouse.

Today, I invite you to another eleven years in this old church, with me as your pastor that like Jim and Maureen we may love in rich times and poor, till Christ's Kingdom comes, his salvation is proclaimed and his love administered. No power, human or supernatural will ever stop, de-rail or defeat this ministry. In good times and bad we too will call on the power of the Holy Spirit to seal these sacred walls and all who shelter and work for Christ within them.

So let us pray for Jim and Maureen in our Eucharist as we celebrate with them 50 Years of marriage. May God Bless and grace them with many years to come.

Amen+