

National Liturgy Conference

6 November 2017

Archbishop Smith, Reverend Fathers and Sisters, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Introduction

It's a pleasure for me to offer all of you a very warm welcome to the Archdiocese of Vancouver for this conference sponsored by the Episcopal Commission for Liturgy and the Sacraments and the National Liturgy Office of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. We have provided bright sun, clear but chilly air, and snow on our mountains – where all snow belongs.

I am especially grateful to Father Terry Fournier of the National Liturgy Office, and to Father Michael McGourty from Archdiocese of Toronto, who will guiding your reflections on “Temple Built of Living Stones” by unfolding the riches of The Order of a Dedication of a Church and an Altar. Allow me as well to express my gratitude to Father Tien Tran, Director of Liturgy for the Archdiocese of Vancouver and to all who helped organize this gathering. Such events always involve an enormous amount of dedicated work, and special thanks are due to them.

After the celebration of Ordination, I must admit that the Rite of Dedication of a Church and Altar is the one which touches me most as a Bishop. I am blessed to be able to do so with a certain frequency as we continue to build new churches in our local Church. Such occasions honour the patient endurance of a community of faith, and it is always

splendid to join with them as the Psalmist sings, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” (Ps 121:1). After many years, the parishioners have a place of worship, which is the new heart of their Eucharist community from which they go forth as missionary disciples to bringing the Good News of the Lord’s love mercy to a waiting world.

When the parish family finally comes together for the dedication of its new church, it does so as a community of “living stones,” where every person is necessary and precious. The solemn celebration has meaning because the parishioners are first called to be a “spiritual house” (cf. 1 Pt 2:5), and so in that way they can then gather worthily as God’s own people in their house of worship. Here they will listen to the Word of God and drink of its living waters and here will encounter the living Lord in his Sacraments, “which are the open windows through which the light of God is given to us, streams from which we can draw God’s very life.”¹

When preaching on this joyous occasion, so full of ancient symbols and rich in mystery, I often take the occasion to remind the parishioners that their new church is not a meeting room, an assembly hall, or a community center. As the solemnity of the Rite so vividly recalls, a church is truly “sacred space,” in which is celebrated the cycle of the Church’s liturgical year, the “sacred time” of salvation history

¹ Francis, General Audience (9 October 2013).

from Creation to the Lord's Coming in glory. Every aspect of a church building points beyond itself to the Heavenly Jerusalem, to Christ Jesus, its Rock and Cornerstone (cf. 1 Pt 2:7), to the Saints, and to the means of salvation prepared for us by the Paschal Mystery.

It is my hope and prayer that your reflection at the Conference, guided by the breath of the Holy Spirit, will inspire you, touching your minds and hearts and draw you more deeply into the mystery of the Church which the Rite of Dedication so magnificently celebrates.

Enjoy the Conference!

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver