

Homily
Church Dedication
St. Thomas Aquinas
Indianola, IA
August 19, 2012

My good friends:

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice Alleluia, Alleluia . . .

It is a day of great joy for all of the members of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish and those of us privileged to gather with you on this historic occasion of the dedication of your remarkably beautiful Church.

Heartfelt congratulations and commendation are owed to Father Ray McHenry for his vision, his gentle and then appropriately direct persuasion to arrive at this moment. He would immediately counter in typical fashion, however, that it is not primarily he who is responsible, but rather a vibrant, selfless faith community constituted by leaders, doers, professionals of the building trades, supporters and very generous parishioners who made this marvel happen. Thus, congratulations and compliments are due to a strong contingent of believers who so highly value their faith and its centrality in their lives – that they jointly pursued a vision that for scores of years to come is destined to keep the bright light of salvation through Jesus Christ alive in Indianola and environs.

Rome was not built in a day. Neither has St. Thomas Aquinas parish arrived at this milestone without dedicated servants who constitute the community's rich history. I welcome in a special way, Bishop Joseph Charron, Bishop Emeritus of Des Moines, who was instrumental in fashioning the incremental development of this parish plant. Two former and effective pastors are also here. Father Bruck led the effort to purchase the land in which this beautiful structure is situated. Father Frank Palmer, who is celebrating his 50th year of priesthood, promoted, I understand, a few dinners and other fundraising activities that eventuated in the pastoral center on these grounds. This building now centers the parish's educational and social ministries. We welcome both priests with genuine gratitude for their long-term outlook that has been essential in bringing us to this day.

We come to dedicate a space – which we recognize to be sacred, set aside for the Lord and expressing this community's cherished relationship with God. We know, however, that this temple, as beautiful as it is, is only of temporal duration. It will surely come to an end. The real church, are the living stones, you and me, the parishioners of St. Thomas Aquinas, who seek to breathe life into ourselves, the stones, in order that they are enlivened through the blessed activity they experience in this new facility set apart for privileged interaction with their God.

Symbols leading us into an experience of worship in spirit and truth have been very carefully incorporated into this building. What immediately attracts the eye from every perspective is that of the new cross, fashioned by an Italian artisan and accommodating today's ceremony by a "just in time delivery." This symbol immediately communicates our God is a loving God. "No greater love is there than this, than one who lays down his life for one's friends." It also calls the Eucharistic gathering into one as the great act of the death and resurrection of Jesus forges us into one body, the body of Christ all of whom are saved through the great act of sacrifice.

From this focal point, we move to the symbols that tell the story of how we are constituted from inert stones to those of living flesh that give birth to the actual Church. We gain entry into God's people through the waters of baptism – through which the salvation won for us by the paschal mystery is applied to each. Through this sacrament of initiation we formally take on identity as a beloved daughter and son of God. Indeed, on the occasion of the baptism of each of us – the heavenly Father proclaims as he did with Jesus, "This is my beloved daughter," "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

The font stands as an ongoing reminder of our Christian identity. When we come through the Church doors we remind ourselves of this identity and hopefully renew commitment as we bless ourselves with Holy Water, "In the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit."

From the baptismal pool we move forward to the center of worship. On this platform, we are nourished by a God who desires our growth in intimacy and friendship with him.

The ambo stands to locate the proclamation of God's Word. Here the revelation of God breaks through the boundaries of time and with fresh and immediate power comes alive. We experience the unfolding of God's heart and mind speaking in the present to each of us and molding us as a community.

Ezra in presenting the law of Moses to the people of Israel assured them it was cause for great joy. "Today is holy to the Lord your God. Do not be sad and do not weep. Go eat rich food and drink sweet drinks." Hopefully, those sentiments might represent our feelings on this momentous occasion. We rejoice not because of what we have done but what God and his revelation continually do for us.

We move from Ambo to the altar – the table of the Eucharist. The altar is intended to be the focal point of each Church. For here the paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, is not repeated but made present. At the moment of the Eucharistic prayer, as a priestly people, we join the ordained priest in the sacrificial gift of Jesus to the Father. We thereby enter more deeply into the very life of God, Father, Son and Spirit.

From this table we are then fed with the body and blood of Jesus, the Eucharistic food. We are initiated into God ever more and take on divine attributes of selfless love,

compassion, forgiveness, justice, peace and joy. This moment also highlights the formation of the Christian community of the parish of St. Thomas Aquinas which corporately is being called upon to address one another's needs and to be an evangelizing witness to the surrounding community. We pray that transformed through God's Word and the Eucharist, what was said of the early Christians might be said of members of St. Thomas Aquinas – "They were of one mind and one heart." "See how those Christians love one another."

The parish community has decided to wait and allot required time to consider and plan the construction and placement of the anticipated new altar, the central symbol of the Church building. I look forward to returning for the consecration of this centerpiece of the praying assembly.

This Church is blessed to be able to utilize a tabernacle, a gift from the people of Rosemount, Iowa. The tabernacle survived a 2004 fire of St. Mary of Perpetual Help Parish in Rosemount. It fittingly provides for the reservation of the consecrated body of Jesus for distribution to the sick, elderly and others unable to join the Sunday assembly for Mass. In addition, it serves as an inspiration for the extension of our Eucharistic prayer in silence and fruitful reflection.

The symbolic nature of the Church also embraces a feature of the early Church. The new Christians soon after the time of Jesus incorporated an octagonal feature as a part of the Church structure as well as in elements of Church design and furniture. This building revives this characteristic in two prominent places - first in the eight-sided design of the baptismal font and secondly the altar platform.

Quite simply, through the octagonal symbolism what is communicated is that the Resurrection of Jesus established a whole new day, the 8th day. It is the beginning of new life, which never ends. We, as Christians, are reminded that we participate in that new day particularly so in baptism and Eucharist. We are thereby challenged to be people of that new life – as new men and women – instituting the Kingdom of God everywhere through the gift of ourselves in union with Jesus for the salvation of the world.

As we dedicate this sacred space, we are aware that it will embrace the lives of people in their most meaningful moments. From the dawn of life to the initiation of God's life in Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist to the sacred moment of lifelong expression of love between husband and wife in matrimony to the time of fulfillment and eternal life with God – pivotal events will take place here highlighting the very reason of existence for each of us humans created in God's image and likeness.

It is my prayer that all of us will recognize the tremendous privilege we share with having this house of God. May we rejoice in our good fortune as recipients of God's never ending providence and fatherly care for us.