

Homily at the Opening Service

(Isaiah 28:14-18; I Corinthians 3:10-23; St. Matthew 21:42-44)

George W. Hoyer

“No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ.” It is a measure of the experience of faith when we echo Thomas, “My Lord and my God.”

It is a measure of the experience of faith when we acknowledge “The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner;” when we exclaim, “This is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes”; when we say with Thomas, “My Lord and my God!”

No option exists other than to build upon that foundation, no option for anyone. There are options about building materials—some will build in gold, silver, precious stones; others in wood, hay, or stubble; but build they will. For one thing they will build *themselves*—“and fire will test what sort of work each one has done.” The people of God will take care how they build— “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”

And they will build the Church—or, better, the Church, the communion of saints, will build the parish, the Church in the place, on this foundation, Jesus Christ, and on this worship and confession, “My Lord and my God.”

It could be a measure of the experience of true renewal of parish worship to echo an apocryphal expression of Thomas—what it is said he said to the other disciples the week after he *wasn’t* at the appearance of the Lord, the week he *was* with the other disciples at the appearance of the Lord—the apocryphal expression he is said to have said as the Lord’s visible presence disappeared and he looked around and saw none save the disciples only; he said: “Wow! Am I glad I was with you when *that* happened!”

The renewal of parish worship could be signaled by a clearer vision of the risen Lord and expressed with Thomas, “Wow! Am I glad I was with you when *that* happened.”

Building on that foundation is not the work of one union—not the union of the ordained, after which the non-ordained are offered a walk-through and the opportunity to accept or reject the finished project; nor is

it the work of the union of the non-ordained, who, after the building is completed send out an invitation for pastoral applicants and schedule trial sermons—and a trial sacramental celebration, one would hope—and then offer the presiding minister's role to a favorite candidate. The work of building on the one foundation is the work of many trades.

It would be wise before we begin this Institute for us all to consider the dangers of labor trouble in this parish building. There are few of us who have not at one time or another been on strike or been stricken. But, "I will not always scold," Aslan said to the children in Narnia as they shamefacedly recalled their failures. And so—this allegory, for which you must make your own application.

They are building on foundations for The Strongbow Centre, a shopping mall across from the Carlton Motel on Highway 30. There is an older house jacked up, resting on stacked piles of timbers, waiting to be lowered to a new position. It is not clear whether the house in its new placement will face east or west, whether it will be higher or lower than it formerly was, whether it will be given a different facade for a contemporary look or will re-pristiniate the Chicago bungalow type it was before.

Different opinions exist. There are picketers. A truck on the highway shoulder is their center. In the bed of that truck they lay down their signs as they rest from the toil and heat of the day.

Inside the construction site is parked a blue car with a security guard standing beside it. He has a video camera held at the ready.

When a cement truck arrives—"Get a load of this"—the picketers take their places as close to the construction entrance as the law allows. The surveillance man takes his camera and records the action for evidence should the disagreements be carried before the judge. The truck pauses while all the participants choose their sides. Then it rumbles through in an attempt to build on the foundation.

If all this were only a matter of opinions, if only preferences were involved, this would not be a serious allegory. But walk down Highway 30 across the next street and you will enter a cemetery. Grave diggers are at work. They use a wooden form, 32" x 84", to mark the boundaries for their work, the shape in which at last all find themselves. And, lest we try to pass it off with a "one size fits all," look around. There is a head stone for Jonathan—he was only one and a half. There are smaller forms for smaller saints. On his grave stone, along with his date of birth and date of death, his name, "Jonathan," and the words, "Our Son," is engraved a small teddy bear.

Would that Jesus had taken the spices brought to his grave and perfumed the world. Would that he had completely transformed us, after these four days of the Church's placement in the earth, that we might present only

a sweet-smelling savor to the brothers and sisters with whom we live and to the Lord.

But he did not. And the warning of the Gospel remains: “The dominion of God will be taken away from you and given to those who will produce the fruits of it.”

What Jesus said to Thomas, “Be not faithless, but believing,” was not only an admonition to acknowledge a raised body of the Lord, but to accept God’s continuing plan of death and resurrection. “Be not faith-less”—do not doubt that even as it was necessary for Christ to suffer many things and thus to enter glory, so the Church of God will know what Capon has called the “lastness, the lostness, the littleness” of the way of the cross before it experiences glory.

But we can be fruitful and we can minimize the striking differences and preferences which divide us. Thomas once said something else: “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16). What all of us should join an apocryphal Thomas in saying is, “Let us die with him that we may also get going with him.”

And so with Thomas and Mary and Peter and all the witnesses of the resurrection, let us take care how we build on that foundation; but let us rise up and build. Build all the life of the Church, its one Baptism and one faith, its nurture, its music, and all the fellowship of gathering to do our liturgy, to show forth his death until he comes, to receive again his living body and life-giving blood, so that we and those who join with us may say, “Wow! Am I glad I was with you when that happened!”

Keep an eye on the service for the burial of the dead as well, for people are praying, “I am glad *You* will be with me when that happens.” And we all look forward to the dawn of the beatific vision when we will join to say, “Wow! Am I glad I’m with *You* now that *that* has happened!”

Come, let us eat and drink to that!