

Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross

Today we celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross commemorating the discovery of Jesus' cross in the fourth century by St. Helena, the mother of the Roman Emperor, Constantine. For the first Christians, the cross was an embarrassment, the humiliating symbol of defeat and death. Eventually the Church embraced the cross as a symbol of hope: the cross was honored as the tree of life, the instrument of God used to bring salvation to his beloved people. We tend to think of crosses as burdens, things – and even people! – that demand so much time and energy from us; our crosses are those obstacles and challenges we long to put aside and be free of. But our real crosses are the opportunities and resources we have that can be sources of hope, of joy, of discovery, of life, of resurrection for ourselves and others.

Two Decembers ago, I shared with you my frustrations at wanting to be your spiritual leader but finding myself confronted with the challenges of our property. I shared my desire to wanting to be your spiritual leader but finding that I was spending a lot of my time and **our** money on maintaining our 26 acres of property and the buildings on them. My job and work is to promote and live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ. My role is to, as unworthy a servant as I am, to help you to become

better disciples/followers of our Lord. I shared at that time what I continue to believe is the underlying value of what I then named the Going Home project: our primary focus is on living the Gospel and developing ministries that not only help us to that end but enable us to help others.

I presented to you and to the township leaders my vision of right-sizing the parish property. The upper property consisting of the Upper Church, the school and the rectory and the surrounding property (all under a reverter deed restriction) would be exchanged for the library next door to the Little Church. We would completely move all of our activities over to the Little Church property to be joined with the adjacent library property. As I said then, we would first and foremost, expand our Little Church, NOT tear it down, to accommodate 500 people. This would be 75-100 more seats than we have now in the Upper Church. The Little Church can presently seat 240 people. Most importantly, we would have **one** Church building that would not be a former gym/auditorium: a true sacred space that is better than what we have now. We would have our administrative offices and meeting places, including religious education, centralized at the library. We had hired an architect to come in to assess and determine if we can fit everything and our activities at the library and we can. But you

need to think of creating a library interior without standard permanent walls creating classrooms but walls that can be retracted when we don't need class type rooms.

We are currently interviewing architects who would be able to EXPAND the Little Church while maintaining its charm and its history while improving it so that it is accessible to the handicapped and place needed bathrooms on the same level of the body of the church. We would hopefully be able to have coffees and gatherings on the same level as well. With being so close to Columbia Middle School we will be able to provide great programming to our young people after they are finished school.

I want to be clear about a few items. If we do exchange the upper property with the township and take over the library, it will cost money. Both the town and our parish have had our buildings' values assessed. The value of the land is not a part of the discussions between the parish and the town, only the value of the buildings. Although we have no official agreement with the town, we have come up with an agreed upon number of \$2.8 million that the town would give to us in the exchange. We have the permission of the Archbishop to run a capital campaign with our goal being \$2 million. This would give us

\$4.8 million to work with in the expansion of the Little Church and the refitting of the library. And yes, we would have enough parking: the assessing architect in his analysis informed us that we would have 15-20 more parking spaces than needed and determined by the town.

When and if we move forward with the exchange of property with the town, we will have to move. We are already looking at options when it comes to where we will have Masses on the weekends. There is a possibility that we can have our daily Masses at Mt. Carmel. Weddings and funerals will have to be held at other parishes that are willing to work with us.

When it comes to the residence for the priests of the parish, we would be looking at buying a house near the Little Church property.

Whether we move ahead with the Going Home project or continue to maintain the 26 acres of property and buildings that we have, we are going to still need to raise money. If we stay on these 26 acres we will need to continue to invest in our facilities to keep them safe and secure for our people. When we did an assessment of the buildings and property four years

ago, it was determined that it would cost approximately \$5 million dollars to repair our buildings and bring them up to code. A feasibility study concluded that we can raise in a campaign the top amount of \$2 million. In addition, the upper property will still be under a reverter clause. We will not own the property outright. This option of keeping things as they are is unsustainable.

Today is the Feast of the exaltation of the Cross: that all of our crosses are, with God, opportunities for growth and hope and life. Crosses do cause pain but as we look at Jesus on His cross, we need to look with eyes of faith and realize that the cross is not the end but the opening up of a new door of life and hope and growth. Crosses may seem like obstacles, like brick walls that are to be avoided, to be gotten rid of.

I have asked God to give my eyes a view of what is beyond my crosses. I can get stuck looking at the pain of Jesus. I need to remember that Jesus had to experience the cross if there was ever going to be resurrection. God has given me the eyes to see beyond our present situation to the potential for our parish: the potential that is more than brick and mortar and parking lots and negotiations. He has given me a vision of a parish based on God, lived out in relationship with each other, a locus

of faith and offering hope to all so that we can be a community of love. May the brick walls that are our own crosses focus our lives on the important things of God.

As I conclude my homily, let's take one of our crosses and place them on the cross of Jesus. Let's share with Him where we hurt, where we suffer where life is difficult for us. Let's ask Him for the grace to see with the eyes of faith beyond our cross to what is ahead. Let's just take a quiet moment and talk to our God.