

REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDINGS-FR. JIM

As human beings we need to experience life in a concrete way and continually use our senses. We see this in the Hebrew Scriptures when the prophet Haggai (Hg 1:2 & 8) is the voice of God when he states: “Go up into the hill country; bring timber, build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and receive my glory says the Lord.” Haggai was speaking to a people that had become lethargic and discouraged after returning from the exile. He was using the rebuilding of the temple as a focus and as a connecting point to help the people rebuild their lives. Then in the New Testament, one of the key meanings of the Incarnation is that God becomes “flesh.” God no longer will seem at a distance, but one that truly dwells with us. In this light, it is interesting that Jesus begins his public ministry in Luke’s Gospel in a tangible place, a synagogue. It is a place that Jesus frequents his entire life. In John’s Gospel, it is the temple which Jesus cleanses because people had lost sight of the meaning of this sacred space and sacred place.

The early church continues the practice of having a place to focus their communal prayer as they gather in House Churches. As time goes on, groups in the Christian Community build churches in the Holy Land over most of the places of significance in Jesus’ life. Later on, we have the great edifices of St. Peter’s Basilica and St. Paul outside the walls in Rome which were built over the resting place of these two great saints of our church.

There certainly have been times or places in the history of our church where we have put too much importance on buildings or other structures. There has also been times when there has been a tendency to minimize the important role that buildings have played and will continue to play in the life of our church. Church buildings mark the times of sacred events in peoples’ lives. The Church is a place of profound memories of the birth of children and their baptism, of the passing on of the treasures of their faith in their children’s or grandchildren’s First Holy Communion, and the passing of a beloved family member at a funeral Mass. It is a rich place of the joys and sorrows of much of their lives. This is echoed in a passage from one of our church documents:

“The Church building is a sign and reminder of the immanence and transcendence of God-who chose to dwell among us and whose presence cannot be contained or limited to any single place. As visible construction, churches are signs of the pilgrim church on earth; they are images that proclaim the heavenly Jerusalem, places in which are actualized the mystery of communion between the human person and God.”

(Built of Living Stones, #50)

So in light of this, I am puzzled when some people say that buildings don’t really matter. They do matter, and that is why when we read in the paper of a closing of a church building there are such strong emotions, of anger or profound sadness. Ultimately it is a balance between remembering that the Church is “the people of God,” and also remembering that we are human beings, “as living stones letting ourselves be built into a spiritual house.” (1Peter 2:5)

So in order to keep our church building in good order we are asking those who are able **to use their Blue Stripe envelope (“Necessary Repairs & Improvements”)** or the **“Special Offering envelope**, so that we can replace our boiler and expand our parking spaces in order to accommodate everyone with our new Mass schedule.