

Bishop's Homily - OUR MOTHER OF SORROWS 90th Anniversary – November 7, 2010

We gather this afternoon to recall a day 90 years ago, - a day in 1920. All the days since have brought us to this day in 2010. It was November 3rd and the beginning of a new parish faith community, - of Our Mother of Sorrows.

While this is not the anniversary of the church building, it is the anniversary of the real Church. It is that Church, which is the spiritual temple of the Holy Spirit, - composed of living stones like you.

It is our duty today to recall and give thanks for those who have preceded us in building up the Body of Christ in Westmont and its surroundings. That includes your various pastors, including Monsignor Thomas Mabon and Father Paul Turnbull, - whom the Lord took from us, even though we were not ready to see him depart so suddenly and unexpectedly into God's everlasting realms. (However, I do think that I sent you a worthy replacement.)

When we recall the 3rd of November in 1920 and the appointment of Father Ward by Bishop John McCort (thus establishing the new parish of Our Mother of Sorrows), we can be tempted to think of it in isolation, as an event that stands alone. We imagine the excitement of those 80-some families (sort of) in a vacuum. However, I am sure that there were other matters on their minds as well.

1920 was an election year. The Democratic President Woodrow Wilson (who saw the United States through the First World War) could not run again due to ill health. Warren Harding (a Republican) was elected as the new president of the United States just a couple of days before Father Ward was named pastor. Just a few months before the establishment of Our Mother of Sorrows Parish, women were granted the right to vote for the first time.

No doubt, there were a lot of political discussions during those days, - not only about who should be president but also who should do the voting.

Earlier in the year, the New York Yankees purchased Babe Ruth from the Red Sox. He cost them \$125,000. The League of Nations was established. However, our Senate voted against our nation being a member.

Walt Disney started his first job at a salary of \$40 per week that year. A New York Times editorial claimed that rockets could never fly. And, 1920 was the year when dogs at racetracks were cheated by being given an artificial rabbit to chase instead of a real one. The hair dryer, the tea bag, and the parachute were all invented. And, the Ford Model T car was selling well.

On a religious note: Joan of Arc was canonized a saint of the Church and Karol Wojtyla, who became Pope John Paul II, was born. He was six months old when this parish was established.

As for any celebrations on the part of the parishioners of the new Our Mother of Sorrows Parish; - they must have been low key. 1920 was the year when prohibition of alcoholic beverages went into effect, -lasting for 13 years. And, since there were no televisions, they could not even look forward to the first Thanksgiving Parade that was to take place in Philadelphia later that month.

That is what was happening around November 3, 1920. That was the framework within which Father Ward was assigned to pastor the new parish faith community of Our Mother of Sorrows.

What is the framework for us today? Actually, we know what it is, - just like our predecessors knew what was theirs. The challenge that confronts us, however, is that, like the Sadducees in the Gospel passage proclaimed today, we forget (or, choose to ignore) that God's spin on occurrences is different from ours. Married individuals are no longer married after the resurrection. However, whether or not they attain the resurrection depends on how they lived their married life.

What goes on during our lifetime will not endure. Our stewardship of those times does.

As your pastor, Father Mark Begly, so aptly put it on this morning's Proclaim television program, "It is a time to reflect on the future." This is a time to reflect with gratitude for the past in order to provide for an appropriate future, - by being good stewards of the present.

After a 90-year history of pastoral service to God's People, it is incumbent upon the present generation of parishioners to heed the words of the Apostle Paul. A portion of what he wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica was read at this Mass. Saint Paul asks that they pray, "that the word of the Lord may speed forward and be glorified, as it did among you."

Of course, he was not speaking merely of reciting a prayer now and then. Rather, it is their very way of living within the world of their day that was to propel the Lord's message into that world and give glory. For, the Apostle assures them that the Lord is faithful and will strengthen them and guard them in this task, since it requires spiritual strength and commitment.

Our Mother of Sorrows is a marvelous patron and example for such a task. Amidst her sorrows, Our Blessed Lady accompanied our Lord on his journey, as He witnessed with word and action to his Heavenly Father's message of love and forgiveness. He was met with hostility and ridicule. His Mother Mary bore the pain and inconveniences without giving up, - all the way to the cross.

We are beneficiaries of the Lord's message in these Allegheny Mountains, - thanks to our evangelizer, the Servant of God Demetrius Gallitzin. We, too, are called to witness in and testify to the world around us, - no matter how difficult.

Working toward the future of this faith community is nothing less than to forge within ourselves an identity that can be recognized as Christ himself, and which finds favor with our God; - an identity of who we truly are, - all the way to the cross.

Our faith journey of today takes place within the context of world events, as did that of OMOS parishioners 90 years ago. Be those events voting for government leaders, utilizing advances in technology, celebrating births and deaths, enjoying sports and entertainment, or (yes, even) accepting a new Roman Missal for the celebration of the Mass a year from now; - they are all a part of our one journey into the Lord's Reign.

So, - no matter what you do, no matter what you are about, remember always who you are, - remember that you are nothing less than members of the Household of God.