

Archbishop Alex Brunett's Homily
Rite of Dedication and Centennial Mass
St. Anne Church
Sunday, December 14, 2008

It's a great joy for me as archbishop to be here to celebrate with you. There are two very significant things, but they are interrelated. One is the fact that you are celebrating a 100th anniversary of this parish. And it has a very glorious and illustrious history. If you have a chance to read it, I got a copy of the history off the internet and it's beautiful. When you look up all the different people and all the stages that this parish went through in its development and its growth. During that time you had many wonderful pastors. Some of them had very interesting reputations and backgrounds. Maybe some of you can remember back that far. But the leadership has always been very strong in this community.

You also have a wonderful history of many lay people doing many wonderful things, and they continue to do that. I believe that in our day and age this is still very much prominent in this parish. So many of you give of your time to make this parish community really a house of prayer, a community of faith that reaches out to others. In reading that history I'm struck also by the many priests who have come from this parish community. One of your own native sons, Father Paul Magnano, comes from this parish. His parents were very prevalent here and the first funeral I went to was just after his father died. I know his mother very well. She is a long-time parishioner here. Father always talks about St. Anne's. The rector of our cathedral, Fr. [Michael G.] Ryan is from here. We have the Dalton brothers [Fr. Jim and Fr. Paul]; one of whom died this past year. We have many vocations from this parish, and the priests have really served the diocese very well. Fr. Magnano is the vicar for clergy. I saw Mary Magnano Smith over here. She's many years the president of Forest Ridge and retiring this year.

You have many people from this parish who have done many things. I'm just pointing them out because I know that they're here, celebrating. Fr. Bowman is not here today because he's afraid of the ice and snow, so he wanted to stay inside! I come from Detroit and this is normal weather, so when people call me up and say are you going to go out there and there's a little ice and snow out there, that's normal and if you couldn't drive on ice and snow you wouldn't survive!

So I am happy to be here to celebrate 100 years. It's a phenomenal achievement. One hundred years of faith, 100 years of families growing up in that context of things. One hundred years of people going out into the world, young people who got married and moved on to raise their own families. One hundred years of people who have tried to live their faith, profess it and proclaim it. This is a very marvelous thing.

We have another aspect of this celebration—we will rededicate this church. Historically, whenever you move the altar or change an altar that is permanent, you rededicate the church. And we're going to do that today and I think the two of them are tied together

because they give us some insight as to what the meaning of a church and a parish community such as this is all about.

I'd like to describe the ceremony that we celebrate today so you can see that it is part of our faith here. I believe that every family and every person that goes to a Catholic church must be rooted in their faith. One of the big problems is that people are not rooted in faith. They've taken religion classes; they've studied catechism; they may know the answers. But to be rooted in faith means that our lives are intrinsically changed. The way we look at things, our vision of life. And the commitments we have, the goals we set for ourselves are rooted in a faith-vision of what life is all about. What we really seek out of life, what we really see as being freedom in our lives. And I'd therefore like to talk about this ceremony. It's kind of reaffirming what this faith has been that we've been rooted in, how it applies to us in the future.

The first thing about this ceremony is that we came to the entrance and we gathered by the door. There at the door the keys of the church were given to me as well as the plans of the church, because this church does not stand in isolation. It's part of the Catholic faith tradition. It's part of the apostolic tradition that we have ever since the time of Peter and Paul. We celebrate that tradition here and therefore in giving the keys of the building to the archbishop, we are saying we are under than one of the successors of the apostle Peter.

This is an apostolic church. It lives in apostolic tradition. Another way we could say it very sophisticatedly is that this a diachronic church—that it goes back through time, to the time of the apostles. It's not just synchronic. It's tied in with what's going on today and it's adapted to all of the modern procedures and customs that have lost a lot of its meaning, but it always goes back to the time of Christ who entrusted this church to his apostles. We are diachronic and the bishop is a sign of that. Your pastoral leader is a sign of that, a community coming together in faith.

So the keys were given to me and the first thing we did was go to the baptismal font because it is through baptism that we enter into the life of the church. We don't come into Catholic identity through any other way but by being baptized. And baptism means we are renewed in Christ. We are taking on a new way of living. We are living as one who is redeemed through Jesus Christ and his life, death and resurrection. Therefore, we see life through that value. Our vision of life is a Christ vision in the sense that we see life redeemed by God. And all of us are called to live in the newness of life through our baptismal commitment. We get baptized, it is a commitment. It's something we make a part of our own.

Most of us have been baptized as infants. We are therefore in the process of catechesis in our life to understand what it means to live that faith, to have that identity. We do not get our identity from a political party, we do not get our identity from a particular nation, yes we live in those and we relate to those, but our true identity comes from Christ. Who we are and what Christ means and what his life, death and resurrection means in term of my life and my understanding of the world in which I live. This is extremely important.

If we don't have that we lose our rooting. And then we're like ships without a rudder going through the world trying to figure out what it's all about. Somebody told me one time an author wrote a book about sports and he used the word "meaning" in the title. Everybody went out to buy the book and they wanted to know what it is. But the word "meaning" seems to be a catch word in our modern culture. People what meaning in their lives, because they can't find it: can't find it in the stock market, can't find it in a number of other places. Meaning. That's what being rooted in baptism means. We have meaning about what our life is and how we live it.

After that I sprinkle this whole church with holy water—the walls and the people. It's like saying we're all baptized, we've been renewed in Christ. This is a new community. This is a new sense of our identity with Jesus Christ. We celebrate it; we celebrate our own life because we have been washed in the waters of baptism which are signs of life. Water is always a sign of life. We have waters that are flowing like this baptismal font has, it reminds us that it is living water. In the early church, when they talk about baptism, the earliest baptismal rituals, it said be sure you don't use dead water or stagnant water. Use flowing waters. Stagnant water doesn't bring life as living waters do. Living water brings us the ability to live in our world, which can be challenging to us in many ways.

Then as we continued in the rite, did you notice that before the readings, I took the Gospel book, raised it in your presence, because everybody here is to be formed by the gospel message. Not to be fundamentalist and go out and pick apart every little chapter and verse of the scripture to apply it to other people; but living signs of the community of faith and how it expressed that, how it lived that faith, how it experienced the presence of Christ. So I held that book up and said, "Let the Gospel be proclaimed here!" This is what we've learned and what we believe. If we don't believe that, we're never going to have that vision, we are never going to be deepened and enriched by that message of faith that is found in Jesus Christ.

And that's very important for us. So every time the Gospel is proclaimed, it is rooting us again further into the meaning of Christ's life. The stories, the parables of scripture, the many kinds of literature, all are meant to broaden our view of the beauty of life and God as creator. It is talking about how to discover the ultimate meaning of life. And the scriptures keep proclaiming that. We sometimes hear the message, sometimes we don't. But when we hear the message, then we know how we are to live, and how we are to respond.

When I finish preaching, we will begin the dedication of the altar and the church in a very special way. We will first have the Litany of Saints. We have hundreds of thousands of saints. In the Litany of the Saints, we are saying that we are a church that doesn't exist only in this moment of history; our history goes back through the ages from the time of Christ. We have all kinds of people who have lived this faith and they are heroes to us. They are people who have stood up in the most difficult times. They are people who gave their lives for Christ in terms of persecution, in the midst of secular worlds who wanted

to destroy them, wanted to mute the message of religion. Some are like the atheist signs out of the capitol. They want to mute what the meaning of religion is. Religion is not evil, it's good.

We are the largest provider of social services in the state of Washington. If we withdrew from that, the state would be in chaos. The state doesn't do it, we do it. The Roman Catholic Church is not a committee who sits on its behind and does not commit ourselves to serving the community. What we have, we give to take care of the poor and the needy. We run Catholic schools. If we were to close every Catholic school in this diocese, the state would have to come up with \$350 million dollars a year to replace them. We're not a people who are taking from society. We are giving all the time. It's a message of our faith. We have a message to give and it's very important. We have a message from Christ that we are to reach out. We are among our people, the society that we live in, people serve to make this a better world to show the meaning of the love and the depth of Christ's love.

That's why we call upon all the saints who throughout history have done that. They've been a great sign; they lived lives that profoundly expressed that. We recall them. They are part of us today, and we are part of that history. It's a diachronic history that we celebrate. We're part of that. We live in that. We celebrate it. We call upon them to be with us today as we continue that great tradition, that outreach, that love of Christ manifested through the Church. And so we pray for them. We remember also all the people from this parish community in the 100 years who have done so many things, who by their faith and by their love for this parish community have made it happen, made it grow and helped us discover what the love of God is in our lives and the love of God that is shared with us.

When that is finished, then I go to the altar. I will then dedicate the altar with oil called chrism. Once a year, I bless this sacred oil at the cathedral. Chrism is used to dedicate things as being set aside, sacred. Something that has sacred value for us, such as the altar, for it is a symbol of Christ. You notice when priest comes to say Mass, he always goes up to the altar and kisses the altar. It is a sign of respect. This altar symbolizes the life of Christ given for us who celebrate the sacrifice of the Mass, the giving of Christ's love for us that is actualized so that we can actualize that event for our own lives. We make that commitment in our life. So you will see me pour chrism on the altar top and rub it into the altar. The altar is not to be moved. It is now permanently set in this community as a sign that we come and gather around this altar to celebrate.

Then we follow that up with lighting incense. It is a very ancient symbol, as the scripture says, a sign of our prayers rising like incense to the house of God. That reminds us that we have to learn to lift up our spirits like incense, and constantly raise awareness in our lives of God's presence, being thankful, being grateful, being people that have something to hold onto in our lives. And that's part of the meaning of accepting that open mystery of God's life, his creative presence in our lives. It also became part of the early church. Even the odor itself gives us some idea that this is a spiritual, sacred place.

Then we light the Paschal Candle and the lights of the church. At the beginning of a dedication ceremony there are no lights on because the symbolism is that when the church is blessed we come into the life to receive the light of Christ. That's what we're called to be—light to the world. That's what Christ called himself: "I am the light of the world." You do not live in darkness, live in the light. So we have to be constantly aware of that.

That's what this dedication is all about – to remind us again in the next 100 years that we're rooted in this reality, in this faith. It's not some vague understanding of life, it's not some message that's good for a week or two; it's a message that fills us in every phase of our life. If that's true, then we are called to be evangelizers. Not to go preach on street corners, but to be able to talk about our faith freely. We don't have to be embarrassed that we have religion, because we believe in God, because we have faith and our lives are given over to doing things that are significant.

Sometimes we get into this kind of mood where it's only me. "This world is only about me. I want my freedom to do whatever I want and everyone else has to get in line!" But our freedom is to be the person God called us to be. And that's unique for each one of us. It can only happen when we have an understanding of who God is and we're responsible for our life. Then I have freedom and then I can have joy. You can't have joy or freedom if you don't have a sense of the ultimate. If you're just going from paycheck to paycheck or investment to investment or house to house, you can't really ever achieve the real meaning of joy and the ultimate meaning in your life. That's why people are so interested in trying to find meaning. Everybody is trying to sell them something to find themselves.

Meaning is found in the mystery of God's presence in our lives. When we find that reality and understand it, so lighting the candle tells us now we are meant to be the light of the world. We are to evangelize that message by the way we vote, by the way we live, the way we treat other people, the way we raise our families, the way we work on the job. All these things are part of that reality. We also need to be witnesses. You can't witness to something if we duck issues, if we run from issues. We're afraid to raise an issue because somebody might not like it, someone may not have that conviction. But if it's an issue that we are witnessing to through faith, our faith is never going to say those people are bad. We're not saying that we should destroy anybody; it's never going to say that we're violent. But we should try to lift the vision of people up to an understanding of the meaning of life.

But it is also a time to celebrate. And you notice that when we celebrate in the church, we gather around the altar. That's the main sign or symbol of faith because here we celebrate Eucharist. Oftentimes, we remind people that when you come in the church and you learn this as a little kid, you put your hand in the holy water font and you make the Sign of the Cross. I often watch people when they go out of church, they do the same thing. But, you know in the history of the church, people never did that when they left church! In fact, at one time the canon law said that you never do it when you go out of the church, because as you come in the church you remind yourself of your baptism

through the baptismal font; but now, having celebrated Eucharist, you've got the fullness of the faith here! And living out the mystery of Christ's presence, go into the world and live it! Don't start all over again, going back to baptism! Now you've received Eucharist and been confirmed, go out and live this faith! Cherish it.

I've said a lot today and I don't want to go on further, because the ceremony is a little bit longer and you'll say "Wow, is he never going to end?. When are we going to get out of here?" But don't worry, because we have a reception after this and there's going to be food. Even if we get snowed in or iced in, there's going to be enough for you. So I just want to give you an understanding of what we're doing this ceremony. And why it's a very nice thing on the 100th anniversary. It is a very important thing.

It's exciting, isn't it? You should go home and mark it down on your calendar, and say, "I was here for the 100th anniversary celebration of our parish community! We honored the great people who have come before us and done so much, but we reminded ourselves that we have to carry on this tradition. We have to be rooted in our faith. We have to be evangelizers. We have to be the witnesses, we have to be those who celebrate our faith and understand it and commit ourselves to it so that we can pass on this great faith of Jesus Christ. So we can continue to live in the apostolic tradition."

My dear friends it's been a joy to be with you today and I hope that the rest of the day will be as blessed as this time together. May we be enriched by it, may we find great joy in what we're doing and may we always live as I have tried to say in the years I have been archbishop here, with a future full of hope. God Bless You.