

20th Sunday After Pentecost, October 2, 2005, Liturgical Year "A"

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Subject: St. Bartholomew's 50th Anniversary

"Leaving a Legacy: 50 Years and Growing"

THE BLESSING OF A GODLY LEGACY

We gather together today to remember fifty years of ministry. We gather together today to thank God for His provision and guidance during the last fifty years, and to celebrate the blessings of this church family we call St. Bartholomew's.

Now before I say anything more, I want to put the last fifty years in some perspective. You see fifty years ago much was different than it is today. Dwight D. Eisenhower was in his first term of office as our President. We were in the middle of the Cold War. Color TV was a luxury. There were no such things as personal computers, many people still received their milk from the milk truck, and gas was only 20 cents a gallon. Yes, a lot has changed in fifty years.

But one thing has remained the same: Jesus Christ is Lord.

You see today is more than just a time to reflect on what has happened in the last fifty years, it is a time to reflect on a godly legacy. According to Webster's Dictionary, a "legacy" is "something you leave behind for others" or "something that comes from the past," or "something received from an ancestor or predecessor resembling or suggestive of a gift by the will." Now we don't hear the term, "legacy" used that often these days. And yet receiving and leaving a legacy is what life is all about.

In fact, God's Word teaches that a legacy is more than what we leave behind, a legacy is what we take with us when we leave this world. A godly legacy has significance past, present and future. And when we talk about St. Bartholomew's, how it began and what it has become, we are talking about a godly legacy. So let us reflect for a moment on this godly legacy.

THE LORD'S LEGACY

You see there's a reason why St. Bartholomew's has flourished these last fifty years. There's a reason why a small mission began in November of 1955 by 50 members from Advent Episcopal Church on the corner of Brighton and Fries Roads, has grown into a strong and vibrant parish of over 1100 members.

It wasn't by accident St. Bartholomew's came to be what it is today. St. Bartholomew's was built on a sure foundation. It was built upon the everlasting truth that Jesus Christ is Lord. And when you talk about a godly legacy, this is where it all begins: Jesus Christ is Lord. The One who said, "***I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.***" (Rev. 22:13) The One Who said, "***I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me.***" (Jn. 14:6) the One to Whom "***every knee shall bow and every tongue confess is Lord,***" (Phil. 2:10,11) the One who is "***the King of king and Lord of lords.***" (Rev. 19:16).

St. Bart's has been a vibrant witness of the Lord Jesus Christ because it has consistently sought to proclaim and live out this truth that Christ is Lord. And through the years, the people of St. Bartholomew's have recognized that the Episcopal Church is not Lord, that our bishops are not Lord,

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that our priests are not Lord, that the fads of the day are not Lord, the things of this world are not Lord, no, *only* Jesus Christ is Lord.

And St. Bart’s has been built on this foundation, not only in words but in deeds. Jesus Christ as Lord has not only been proclaimed, it has been lived out. Fr. Amend arrived at St. Bart’s in 1965 and the Lord used him to take our church to the next level of no longer being a mission but rather a self-supporting parish. And for thirty-three years Fr. Amend not only preached and taught the Lordship of Christ, he lived it. He would tell us to pray the daily office four times a day, and do you know what? He did what he said. What you saw was what you got with Fr. Amend. He lived his faith.

Many of our curates and assisting clergy were no different: Fr. Wickenden, Fr. Montanari, Fr. Howell, Fr. Jones, and Fr. Hubbard; our deacons Ed Kusmierczyk and John Commins and Richard Molison (who later became a priest and is now Rector of St. Stephen’s in Niagara Falls.) These were and are men who lived their faith. But it wasn’t just the clergy, dozens of lay leaders over the years – vestry members and wardens, Sunday School teachers, ushers, acolytes, choir members, altar guild members, Bishop Scaife Guild members and those serving in other capacities – all have sought to keep Christ as Lord both in word and in deed. Jesus said, **“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (Jn. 14:15).**

Of course Jesus taught us to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. But how do we do it? The only way we can know the how and the when is by reading and understanding this book – the Holy Bible. And here at St. Bart’s this book, the Word of God, has always been front and center of everything we do. The Word of God has served as our guide and as our compass. It is through the Word that we come into a relationship with Christ. **Romans 10:17** tells us **“that faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”** And so a godly legacy is first and foremost the Lord’s legacy and this means that it has been and remains built on the foundation of Christ’s Lordship and the Word of God.

A LIVING LEGACY

Jesus said, **“I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” (Jn. 15:5).** You see not only is this godly legacy the Lord’s legacy, it is a living legacy. In other words though we reflect on the last fifty years, what has happened these last fifty years has made us who we are today. And who we are today are people alive in the Spirit. Who we are today are people who know what it means to have a relationship with the living God!

And if something is made alive by the Lord, it will be growing. What does Jesus say? If we remain in Him we will bear much fruit. We will be growing in faith, growing in knowledge and wisdom and growing in numbers. Why? Because we will be impacting others by what we say and what we do.

And when we look back at the last fifty years this is what we find at St. Bartholomew’s – over 1100 persons baptized, over 1300 people confirmed, over 750 married, and over 4000 members at one time or another. Thousands impacted for the Gospel. Thousands taught, encouraged and strengthened in their walks with the Lord.

We also find examples of how St. Bartholomew’s reached out to those in dire need. In the 1950’s, St. Bartholomew’s sponsored three Hungarian soldiers who had defected from their country

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following the uprising in 1956 and came to America as refugees, in the late 70’s our church sponsored a Laotian family displaced by war, and only a few years ago the people of St. Bart’s reached out and sponsored a Moslem family from Bosnia.

And over the years, there have been countless rummage sales and fairs that have raised money for the homeless and the needy in our community. And literally hundreds of thousands of dollars given to Christ-centered ministries throughout the world.

Of course, who can forget what happened in 1968 when Fr. Amend ripped and ruined his black suit chasing vandals who had attempted to break church windows? The vestry voted him funds for a replacement. It gives new meaning to the phrase, “Reaching out in the name of Christ.” ☺

Seriously, we have seen the growth of Christ’s body here at St. Bart’s and we have seen how this growth has touched thousands around the world, all this from a few dozen who stepped out in faith, fifty years ago.

Now I would like to take a moment to recognize the founding members who are still with us today -those who were here during the first years when St. Bart’s was only a mission, when our members would meet in a prefabricated building at the corner of the current parking lot: Dorothea Haase, Don and Gladys Miller, Red and Mary Ellen Anello, Jim and Eleanor Huffcut, Molly Mack, Hilda Paolucci, Frank and Connie Heer, Wayne and Lois Hubbard, Gloria Marshall, Shirley King, Cheryl MacDonald, Lee Ann Wilkinson, Bob and Connie Welch, Vera Foehl, Beverly Graber, Don and Jenny Davenport, and David Gray. We thank you for your faithfulness and your dedication to our Lord and to this parish.

You see everything we do in the Name of Christ. Everything that has been done in faithful obedience to Him, will continue to impact people. It is like that little pebble thrown into the water. After it hits the water the ripples go outward touching a far greater area than the size of that first splash. Or it is like that mustard seed that is the tiniest seed but grows into a huge tree. The Bible tells us that we plant and water, but God gives the growth.

And so we are part of something that is not only greater than ourselves but is living and active. We are members of a growing body of Christ, interconnected by our baptisms and by the Holy Spirit who lives in us, and not only linked together one to another here at St. Bartholomew’s but linked together with every other Christian believer and body of Christ throughout the world and throughout time. You see a godly legacy is a living legacy. It is one that is alive, and it is one that is constantly bearing fruit.

A LASTING LEGACY

But not only are we part of a living legacy we are also part of a lasting legacy, a legacy that will remain forever. A legacy that is eternal. For what we do on this earth is not only something we leave behind for our children and our children’s children, it is something we take with us. And what we take with us is our relationship with the Lord and the good that we do on this earth. You see it is by God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit working in us that good works come about. And it is the good that we do on earth that will be what we take with us. And that good serves as an eternal reward. It is a testimony to God’s grace and our faithfulness. And it is something that can never be taken away from us.

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Why do you think Jesus said, ***“Don’t lay up for yourselves treasures for yourselves upon earth where moth and rust destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But build up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth or rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.”*** (Mt. 6:19-20).

For when all is said and done, it will be only those things that have been done in Christ’ name and to His glory that will be remembered. Everything else is passing away. Everything done at City Hall in Buffalo is passing away (I know some of you are thinking “thank God!”), all the construction projects and new developments, all the laws, the philosophies, and works of man, all those Bills and Sabres games, all the parties and escapades of this community will be long gone and forgotten. But what was done here in the name of Christ and to His glory – the babies baptized, the young people confirmed, the healings, the miracles, the marriages saved, the poor helped, the grieving comforted, the addicts set free, the gospel proclaimed, the money given for the Lord’s work – those things will be remembered. Such things will be celebrated in glory.

And so my brothers and sisters this is our godly legacy. It’s why St. Bart’s has grown and flourished these last fifty years. It’s why St. Bart’s will continue to grow and flourish in the years to come. And it’s why we can look forward to the future, when we will meet our Lord face to face and be able to give Him thanks for the legacy He has enabled us to have.

So as we celebrate what God has done in the last fifty years may we always give Him thanks and praise for the foundation He has established and the good work that He has done and continues to do through the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!