

19th Sunday After Pentecost, September 25, 2005, Liturgical Year “A”

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

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

Subject: Fr. Hubbard’s Farewell

“A Job Well Done”

A TIME TO SAY GOOD-BYE

Well we have come to that time that we’ve all been dreading, the time when we officially say good-bye to our beloved Associate Rector, Clark Hubbard. When I began preparing for this message, I thought maybe the appropriate title for this message should be, *“It’s not too late to change you mind!”*

Seriously, though, the words I think that are fitting in summing up Fr. Hubbard’s time with us are simply these: *“A job, well done.”* And yet such words don’t seem adequate either. It is more than just a job that Fr. Hubbard completed here at St. Bart’s. Fr. Hubbard’s time with us was a divine appointment, it was a rendezvous with destiny, it was the fulfillment of God’s will. And for that we can be truly grateful this day.

PHILEMON 4-5, 7

If there is one passage in the Word of God that sums up the time Fr. Hubbard and his wife Emily had with us, it is found Paul’s letter to Philemon. Please turn with me in your pew bibles to this passage - **Philemon verses 4, 5 & 7**. I think this passage really encapsulates Fr. Hubbard’s time with us. Paul says: *“When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. I have received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.”*

Those verses give a good description of Fr. Hubbard’s time with us. They sum it up. We have witnessed in these last four years a man’s love for God’s people and a man’s great faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been encouraged. We have been refreshed. We have been inspired by Fr. Hubbard’s example. And yet, we cannot forget that his time with us was the Lords’ doing. It was not by accident Fr. Hubbard came to us.

A HEART FOR MINISTRY

For two years before Fr. Hubbard’s arrival, I had been looking for a full-time assistant. I had asked everyone in the church to pray and many had been praying during this time. But it had been rather difficult to find a full time assistant. In the spring of 2001, I had just finished an interview with a seminarian and it was apparent he was not “right” for St. Bart’s. So I resigned myself to the fact that I would have to wait one more year, until the next graduating class of seminarians before I could find someone.

But then a week later I get a call from a seminarian by the name of Clark Hubbard who said he was interested in the position at St. Bart’s. Now two things stood out in that conversation. The first was that he and his wife were from Alabama. I knew there was something special about a person who was willing to leave the warmth of the south for the snow of Western New York. And second, Clark asked me about lay ministry. He asked how was the lay ministry of St. Bartholomew’s. At first, I

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thought, why is he concerned about lay ministry? He is going to be ordained and a priest. But I found out later why this was on his heart – and I will share its significance in a few moments.

So Clark and Emily came up, we had a good interview, they met with the bishop, they were able to visit one of our Friday Night Bible Study to meet some of our parishioners and a month later Clark accepted the call to our new Curate. And as they say the rest is history – but it is more than that, our parish has grown and flourished because of the Hubbard’s time with us.

Before Fr. Hubbard joined us, I for the most part was serving our parish alone. Thankfully, Fr. Montanari was gracious enough to help me in his retirement. But this parish is too big for one priest. So with Fr. Hubbard’s arrival, it truly renewed my strength and refreshed my soul. We were able to strengthen existing ministries and move forward with new ones.

Fr. Hubbard played an instrumental role in developing our Men’s fellowship group. He taught our confirmation classes, trained our acolytes, visited our sick and shut-ins and was always available to see parishioners who needed to talk to a priest. Fr. Hubbard made sure that healing services were offered, he organized our intercessory prayer ministry, and he oversaw the spaghetti evangelism and the recent Rock Rods and Relationships outreach event and car show.

And then we cannot forget about his wife, Emily. Emily help start the Beth Moore Bible Study and that served as a catalyst for an active and vibrant woman’s ministry that continues to grow. She was not only there for the women of the church, but even helped form the C. S. Lewis Book Club. You see both Fr. Hubbard and his wife Emily demonstrated their passion for lay ministry. They had a desire to see the people of our parish involved in the work of ministry. And we as a parish benefited from that desire.

A FAITHFUL SERVANT AND FRIEND

And through these last four years, Fr. Hubbard was always there when we had to face difficult challenges. Fr. Hubbard was there in the aftermath of September 11, which happened only two months after he came. He was there with me when we had to go to the hospital to learn of Fr. Jones death. We had the joy of working together with Fr. Jones for two years, but then Fr. Jones went home to be with the Lord only two years later on the day after Christmas. Fr. Hubbard was a comforting presence. Fr. Hubbard was there when we faced the challenge of our national church turning its back on the Word of God. He was there when we had to deal with our diocesan bishop who was often inconsistent and hostile in his approach to our parish. Fr. Hubbard was there when my brother died of cancer almost a year ago.

Through it all Fr. Hubbard was there. He was faithful. He was dependable. He was reliable. All priests are not alike in terms of quality of character. Not all are examples of integrity, faithfulness, and humility. But thanks be to God, we saw all three in Fr. Hubbard. He made this parish a stronger place. He brought us closer together. And I might add that as long as I am Rector of St. Bart’s , both he and Emily can call this place home. Fr. Hubbard, if you ever need a place to serve, the door will always be open at St. Bartholomew’s.

A NEW CHAPTER

Now Fr. Hubbard is on to a new chapter in the Lord’s ministry. He will be Rector of St. Elizabeth’s in Richmond Hill, Georgia. Here at St. Bart’s I believe we are called to prepare our

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assisting priests to be able to go out and serve the Lord on their own. We would like them to stay as long as possible, but we must be willing to let them go. I can say without reservation, that Fr. Hubbard is ready to be rector of his own parish.

Fr. Hubbard, you will soon know what it’s like to be Rector. It is a wonderful ministry but it does mean things will be different than what you’ve been used to. Namely, the buck stops with you. You will carry an awesome responsibility. My advice to you is simple: Don’t sweat the small stuff, be faithful in the little things and the big things will take care of themselves, and make sure Jesus is first in all that you do. Realize you will never please everyone but you must always please the Lord, and that means loving His people and following His vision. I know that you will do well. God has prepared you for this very call. He has laid a firm foundation and we are thankful that He used St. Bart’s as the means through which to do it.

And so in closing, not only do I want to say thanks again to Fr. Hubbard for his service and faithfulness, not only do I want to say “thank you” once more for the love he has demonstrated for our church family and the Lord, I want to say “thank you” to our great God and Savior.

These were awesome times and they won’t be forgotten. It is such times as these, and the relationships that have been formed, which will last forever, and for that we can be eternally grateful to the Lord.

So let us rise and give the Lord a standing ovation for the wonderful work He has done through Fr. Hubbard during these last four years.

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