

St. Pius X, Billings – 25th Anniversary Celebration

October 22-23, 2022

It is good to be here! We gather to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of this church building, and we also the celebrate the living stones that also create this community.

For most of us, certain places hold a special, almost sacred meaning. If you are married, it might be the place where you proposed or the place where you were married. For parents, it could be the church where your children were baptized or the place where you were when you first learned that you would be a parent. Sacred spaces become special because it is there that our lives were changed in some meaningful way.

Today we gather to celebrate this place and its history. What is this place for? Why is it special? Why is it sacred?

Here—this floor, this roof above us, these walls, and windows—here is a place that is a house for the church, our house. In this house some vital actions take place. Here we confess our sins and praise the goodness and mercy of God. Here we gather around couples ready to commit themselves to each other. Here we keep the oils for anointing the sick and the anointing of catechumens and the newly baptized. Here we keep the sacred Chrism for the sacrament of Confirmation. And it is here that we bring the bodies of those who have died so that together we can commend our dead to the loving embrace of our God — from the font to the altar to their place of earthly rest.

And it is here, week by week, that we come together. We give attention to God's Word, it is here that we pray for every needy one in the world. It is here where we give thanks to God over bread and wine and share together in the holy communion.

All these actions, all these deeds done publicly, and the many devotions done more privately, have, little by little, bit by bit, made this place dear to us, holy. But this is far more than tender sentiment. It is here that we are strengthened to do our work, to make disciples. It is here that we encounter our God in word and sacrament. Here that we encounter God in each other. And it is from here that we are sent out into the world to be and to make disciples, sharing God's love with the world.

This all begins at the Font. Those who are born here – and that is all of us, from one baptismal pool or another – we are brothers and sisters, we are family. And it is from here that we are destined for another city, a city not made by hands, but somehow a city we are helping to fashion day by gracious day in this earthly realm. In this house, we must have water to baptize, water to sign us in remembrance of baptism and our call to serve, our call to ministry.

Besides the font with its water, really the only other essential furnishing of this house of the church is the table, the Altar. Churches don't have to have pews, benches or chairs. These were late additions in our history. Churches don't need candlesticks. They don't need Stations or stained glass. They don't need the pulpit or ambo because the book of the scriptures can be held by the reader and proclaimed to the assembly. But our house does need the table, the altar, with its bread and wine. It is the heart of all that we do and are becoming.

It is here that we gather around the table, the altar. It is the center of our assembly that calls us to gather around in great reverence for the deeds to be done here. As we gather, the presider and deacon approach this table and greet it with a deep bow and with a kiss, a kiss given on behalf of all the assembly, for the table itself is for us a presence of the Lord Jesus. That so intimate of a human deed—the

kiss—becomes our greeting of this table and also our farewell when we take our leave.

If we wish to know better who we are, we begin here at the altar — before it is even prepared, before it holds the bread and wine that will become the body and blood of Christ, we gather here.

At this altar we ask: What sort of people would place in its midst a simple table? With this altar, we tell each other, and we tell the world who we are. We gather around an altar, attentive, needy, and ever proclaiming the praise of God. We gather around this altar ever giving God thanks for coming to dine with us: bread broken for us and a wine poured out for us.

And we also need a place where the holy bread is kept as food for the dying, as food for those who are sick and cannot be in the assembly, the tabernacle.

So the font with water, the altar with bread and wine, what else is the feast of the anniversary of this church about? It is about the Body of Christ. It is about you and me. Yes, we are needed in this house, you are needed. We are the church. You are the living stones. It also includes those who have gone before us marked with the signs of Faith, who join the communion of Saints. They are here too. But that is not all. With God there is always more! There is always room for more, and we have work to do. There is always room for those we have not yet invited inside and those not yet born.

It is from this holy place that we are sent out into the world to be Christ to and for one another, Christ to the whole world. That is our mission; that is our identity. It all began and begins here.

This is indeed a sacred space: we come here to do Eucharist, to baptize, to pray, to anoint, to confess, to marry, to bid farewell, to bless and to be sent forth to be and to make disciples. This is indeed a sacred space.

It is good that we are here!