

July 1, 2018                      St. Peter Parish, Douglas                      10:30 a.m.

80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Parish/60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Church

(Special Readings: Is. 56: 1,6-7; 1 Peter 2:4-9; Jn.4:19-24)

Praised be Jesus Christ! What a beautiful and **quite warm** day to celebrate this dual anniversary in the life of this parish community: the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of St. Peter as a Parish; and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary (almost to the day) of the Dedication of this particular Church building! (I believe the actual day was on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1958, on the Solemn Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul! Both of those events are extremely important, each in their own way.

Are any of you here this morning able to remember the Dedication Day for this church? ..... Or perhaps your parents or grandparents?

There's a certain point in one's life (and I'm at that point in mine) when to talk about something happening 60 years ago doesn't seem that long. Now 80 years--well, that's another story! 😊

This beautiful church, which has succeeded the original one which is still standing about a mile from here in downtown Douglas, along with the old school, was built in almost exactly a year's time from the laying of the cornerstone, at an estimated cost of \$200,000 (which was quite a pretty penny in 1958 dollars!).

I had the good fortune of being here on Wednesday of this past week since Fr. Fabio, and you all, were kind enough to host a number of our Priests for an Afternoon of Prayer. Since I was able to be a participant and not a presenter, I got to spend my time of prayer on "that side" of the altar, and of course, I had a completely different viewpoint than I normally do when I celebrate Mass here. So I was able to see the design and the layout of the church from a new perspective, and it really is quite unique and distinct.

And as I was re-reading the history of the parish, I read that the architects and the pastor, at the time Father William Hoogterp, along with his consultative bodies of parishioners, when designing this church, envisioned the building to be similar to what they imagined, in the words of the parish's historical record, "the first Church designed by God Himself for the Israelites---a tent that covered the sanctuary while the people arranged themselves outside". I think we could actually see it that way. And in explaining the design of the sanctuary, it was noted that this large fixture above the Crucifix, known as a "Corona", which

means “Crown”, is designed to represent both a wagon wheel and a compass. Once again, according to the parish historical record, wagon wheels in churches in the past were somehow supposed to represent the Sun, and convey the reminder that Jesus is the Light of the World; and as a compass, to remind us that Jesus’ teachings are directed to the ends of the earth.

As we heard in this morning’s beautiful First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah, people from all parts of the known world and from every walk of life were being invited by the Lord God to come to His holy Mountain so as to *“make joyful in My House of Prayer”*.

We also heard this morning’s beautiful Psalm Refrain inviting us---all people--- *“Let us go rejoicing to the House of the Lord”*.

Ever since those most ancient days in Holy Scripture as people came to know the God Who revealed Himself to them as a God of Love and Mercy, people have come together to give God worship and praise, whether that was in a tent on God’s Holy Mountain, in a building made of cedar in Jerusalem, or in a church in Douglas, Michigan overlooking Lake Kalamazoo. We come to the “Lord’s House”-- --to His “House of Prayer” ---to give Him our worship, to listen to His teachings, and to receive the goodness of the Lord---and in our privileged case as Catholics, to be able to receive the most Precious Gift of the Holy Eucharist---the very Gift of Jesus’ Body and Blood to be our spiritual Food and Drink.

We call this building, or any building which is the gathering place for God’s People, a Church. In Greek the word is “ekklesia”; in Latin the word is “ecclesia” (from which we have such words as “ecclesiastical” and “ecclesiastics”), and in Spanish, it is “la iglesia”. But really and truly, the Church is not just the building; the Church/the Ecclesia/la Iglesia--- is God’s Holy People---the Church is the Body of Christ---the Church is US!

And so, once again going back to the Reading we heard this morning from the Prophet Isaiah, the People were invited to God’s House of Prayer, but before gathering together, and after returning to their homes after being in the House of God, the People were directed-----instructed----commanded to live in God’s ways: *“Observe what is right, do what is just!.....keep the Sabbath from profanation.....be faithful to My Covenant!”* The Church is those people who follow God and live in God’s ways in whatever we do and wherever we find ourselves. (reference to Pope Francis’ *Gaudete et Exsultate*, definition of Holiness.)

And for us, as Catholics, the Church is the Body of Christ---we who are baptized into Christ---we who profess that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior----we who commit ourselves to live according to Jesus' teachings which guide us in our personal lives, motivate our choices, and give direction to our entire lives in this world. We who love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength, and who love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We who model our lives on Jesus, the Good Shepherd, the Suffering Servant, and the Light of the World.

"The Church" has been alive and well and growing here in the Douglas/Saugatuck area for many generations, even before St. Peter was created as a parish in 1938. Before there was this church, or the previous church, people came together wherever they could, and whenever they could find a priest, to worship in each other's homes, and other gathering places, until their numbers grew to where they needed a larger gathering place, or church. But all the while, they were the "living Church", doing the best they could to follow Jesus and be faithful to the teachings of the Church. For a while, the "Church" here in Douglas was a "mission" to St. Mary Parish in Byron Center, and then to St. Basil in South Haven, but then in 1938, it became a Parish in its own rite, partly because the numbers of "visitors" from the Chicago area continued to grow---so those of you who are here who fit in that category, or who are regular "visitors" from elsewhere----your predecessors are partly responsible for this parish's establishment. 😊

This Parish not only depended on other parishes in its early days for its support, this Parish also has "given birth" to another Parish, San Felipe de Jesus in Fennville. It was here in the late 1950's that "the Mexican ministry" was initiated, as the number of Spanish-speaking Catholics was growing in this area, which has grown into our Hispanic Ministry Programs that are so developed and serving the needs of our Catholic Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters in so many parishes throughout our Diocese.

Your parish's patron, and the Church's first pope, St. Peter, wrote so beautifully in this morning's Second Reading, referring to US: *"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own who are called to announce the praises of Him Who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."* That is our identity as those baptized into Christ. And just as this church building is made out of actual stones (and other building materials), so too does St. Peter remind us that we are *"living stones (which are to be) built into a spiritual house."*

In the conversation that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman that we heard in this morning's Gospel, it doesn't matter whether we worship on the mountain or in Jerusalem; wherever we worship, we are to worship God "*in spirit and in truth*".

And so today, we celebrate all the good that St. Peter Parish has done over the course of the more than 100 years during which people have been gathering together in Jesus' Name here in Douglas, for the past 80 years that St. Peter has been an established Parish, and for the past 60 years that people have been coming to this particular church building to worship "*in spirit and in truth*". We give thanks for the priests who have served here throughout that time, for the Sisters who served here for many years during this time, and for all the people who have been baptized into Christ, received Him in the Holy Eucharist, been confirmed in the Holy Spirit, have been sacramentally married and have created domestic churches in their homes sharing their faith with their children and their children, for all who have encountered the Mercy of Christ in the Sacraments of Confession and Anointing of the Sick, and all those who have been returned to the Lord at the end of their earthly pilgrimage thru the Funeral Rites of the Church.

But today, we not only think about the past; just like any anniversary, today is an important time to prepare for the future. What kind of parish does St. Peter need to be in 2018? What kind of Parish will St. Peter be in 2038 when the Parish celebrates its 100th anniversary?

Pope Francis gives us some very important guidance in that regard. Here is how he describes what all parishes should be. "The parish is the presence of the Church in a particular territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach." (#28, E.G.)

We, who are the Church, know how important our Faith is to us as we try to live lives of holiness in the midst of a world that is moving further and further away from God and God's ways. As followers of Jesus, we bear much more responsibility than taking care of our own spiritual lives; we are called to be people who not just practice our Faith with devotion, but who also give witness to our Faith with great joy, courage and boldness. Our Faith is not only to help us to

make our way through this world and at the end of our lives, hope we will go to Heaven, but more than that, we are to live our Faith with great conviction in all that we do, letting our Faith shine like a light to the world rather than putting it under a bushel basket, helping to build the Kingdom of God here in this part of the world through our acts of charity, our works of mercy and pursuing justice for the oppressed, and then, we pray, go to Heaven at the end of our lives.

St. Peter Parish is here to help us to do all that, to be our gathering place to support one another and to provide the graces of the Sacraments, so that we, as what Pope Francis likes to call “missionary disciples”, can help to bring the world to Christ.

May the present generation of Faithful members of St. Peter Parish, and all the generations still to come, do all that we do for the continued growth of the Faith; and thru the intercession of our dear Blessed Mother, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may we give glory and praise to our Loving Father, through Christ our Lord.

God bless you now and always!