

Our parish was founded in 1944, the little white church completed in 1945. There is a photo of this building, dated 1946; the caption says, "temporary church." Years passed. Sometimes funds were raised for a new worship space--sometimes the money drifted off. St. Thomas More, Immaculate Heart of Mary built, but the little white building remained. Years pass. In 1998, Sunday morning spilled over into the parish gymnasium, complete with bleachers, basketball hoops, and plywood altar. In August of 2007, St. Mary's Bethel opened their new church.

Since 1970, every three years, the parish heard this cry to God from the Prophet Isaiah, today's first reading: "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down...while you wrought awesome deeds that we could not hope for." It could have been the St. Bernadette weekly prayer: "God, rend the heavens and come down!"

Here's the story behind that cry to God: the Jewish people HAD a wonderful church, their Temple, built by King Solomon. The Temple was 90' long, 30' wide, with a ceiling 30' high. It stood nine feet above ground level, with walls nine feet thick. It was rich and beautiful, and it stood for 350 years. In 587, the Babylonians invaded and drove the Jews into exile. Fifty years later, in 538, they returned----to find their Temple burned to the ground. There was no money to rebuild it, and the people were exhausted and divided.

And so they cried out to God, "Rend the heavens and come down!" And they believed that God was angry with them because of

their sins; but still they hoped. They prayed: "You O Lord, are our father; we are the work of your hands. Would that you would meet us doing right!"

23 years after they returned to Jerusalem from the exile, work on the Second Temple finally began. The Wailing Wall is the foundation of that Temple.

A little over a year ago, St. Bernadette began its second--and last--campaign drive. Every weekend and for some every day, we prayed, "Guide our efforts toward a new worship space." "Rend the heavens, O God! And when you come, would that you would meet us doing right!" Three weeks ago, twelve of us pilgrims at Lourdes stood not far from where St. Bernadette saw the Virgin Mary in 1858; humbly prayed the Campaign Prayer and as always, ended with "St. Bernadette, pray for us." [pause]

On Monday afternoon, at 4:00 pm, we received a call from the Archdiocese giving us permission to build our new church. It is something of a miracle. There are some details to be worked out, but unless something goes terribly wrong, we can expect to celebrate next Christmas in the new worship space, "modest, reverent, beautiful"--and paid for.

This I know: God did not give us this brand new church so that we could be the same old parish! And so our prayer must continue: "Make our lives worthy of the new St. Bernadette! Rend the heavens once again, O Lord! At this Mass, at this Holy Communion, rend the heavens! At this Christmas, so filled with distractions, come to us, and meet us doing right! Rend the heavens during the next twelve months, so that we will be spiritually prepared for our new church!"

