

Just a few words: a guest a bit later in the liturgy. Yesterday morning we had "Breakfast with Santa." Two years ago, I climbed onto Santa's lap, and when he said, "and what do YOU want for Christmas?" I said, "A new Church!" ("I'll see what I can do.")

[pause] Well, I want to show you something. I was just given this on Friday. It's the architect's sketch of the planned new church for St. Bernadette. It's very nice....wait a minute! It says Fr. Francis Buddlemeyer, pastor! *Fr. Buddlemeyer was pastor here from 1959-1965!*

OK, here's the sketch of the new worship space, nice and big. No, wait--this is dated 2002! That's not right!

Over in the Parish Center, there are 30 pages of construction diagrams for the new church that we have been given permission to build. We just had another successful meeting with the Archdiocese, and now we can expect groundbreaking in 60-90 days, depending on the weather.

"Comfort my people," God told the Prophet Isaiah. "They have received from the hand of the Lord double for all their sins." In other words, more suffering than the people deserved. Forty-nine years the Israelite people were in exile in the desert of Babylon, forty-nine years with no Temple. "Comfort my people, they have suffered enough--and the Lord himself is going to lead them to their new home!" For 50 years and more, the people of this parish have waited for this day. You have suffered so much desert, so many valleys and

mountains and rough country. Well, the exile is over. Get out your shovel and find a plastic hardhat. It's not my church, not even your Church: it's Christ's church, his gift to us after 50 years and more.

What have we learned through all this? 1) Prayer makes a difference--don't stop praying. 2) God has no timetable: a thousand years in his sight are as one day; fifty years is a nanosecond. 3) Don't give up your hope, even if the situation is very dark. God may still surprise you. 4) The desert that you are in will not last forever; there is a Promised Land waiting for you.

A new church in twelve months. How can we prepare? 1) By continuing to pray. 2) This will sound so simple: by being very good. By turning away from sin, whatever it looks like in our life. By becoming more holy, more worthy of this wonderful, miraculous gift from above.