

15th Sunday

Cycle B

July 12, 2009

This week was almost like Easter: as if slowly rising from the ground, as if a miracle we could never have predicted, our new church begins to take shape. The steel was raised in two days; the cement--all 90 cubic yards--was poured on Friday morning. On Monday, framing begins.

On November 22, the church and altar will be blessed and consecrated by Archbishop Pilarczyk, followed by a gala reception. November 22 will for once be a festive and happy day. [pause]

And then we'll have our church, all 485 seats or so. And then what? What will we *do with our new church?* We'll fill it, that's what!

And why would we want to fill our new church? To bring more people to Jesus, to show them a better way to live. To bring healing and forgiveness to broken bodies and wounded spirits.

And who are all these people going to be? Ourselves....and newcomers....and young people....and non-practicing Catholics....and the non-churchedand maybe Hispanics and African-Americans.

And who is going to bring all these folks in? Um, um, the pastor.... Pastoral Council...the DRE...the Spiritual Life Committee, the beautiful new sign out front....the website. Maybe people will run out of gas on Jenny Lind!

Friends, let me say this clearly: Jesus gave his Church to the twelve disciples! Not to religious authorities and experts. No, the 12 were laypersons, working people: four were fishermen, one

collected tolls, one was a revolutionary (we would call him a terrorist). Two had terrible tempers, one was a thief. Jesus chose these twelve, and He sent ALL of them out to continue his ministry of forgiveness and healing--not just the six holiest or best speakers! Even Judas goes on mission and casts out demons! He just didn't get help for his own. *God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called!* And not only are the twelve totally unqualified: they can't even take anything with them. God's grace will do it all. *[pause]*

Like Amos in the first reading, 750 years before Christ. God chooses this farmer who lives in the south, which is Judah, to preach in the north, which is Bethel. And Amos is supposed to preach to these strangers about social justice, of all things! And what are Amos' qualifications? He is a "dresser of sycamore trees." ("I have a big male here; I need a 46", extra long!") Turns out that a "dresser of sycamores" would puncture the bark of sycamore trees to let out the worms that lived under there. That was Amos' preparation for preaching to strangers about caring for the poor. *God doesn't call the qualified; God qualifies the called.*

Our new church is a gift and a responsibility. God did not give us this miracle simply for our own convenience. You and I can't simply say, "Well, I'm not good at talking to people; I'm a sinner myself." The new church is God's gift to us; it's the opportunity and therefore the responsibility to bring many more people to....to what? To healing, to forgiveness, to a better way of life. People are suffering from demons of various kinds. They sin because they are

wounded.

The Letter to the Ephesians says that God "chose us" so we that "we might exist for the praise of his glory."

On November 24, 2008, God chose to give St. Bernadette a new church, a new future, unbounded opportunity. One year later, just 19 weeks from today, the doors will open for the first. What a gift! What a responsibility!