

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

What We Build

When I was six years old, my father drove me to an empty field in Maryland on a brisk December morning. He parked the car by the side of the road and we got out and he pointed to some massive, rusting arches that stood in the middle of the field. “There it is,” he said. “That’s our church.” He took out a small Instamatic camera and took a few snapshots.

It wasn’t a church. It was a bunch of bricks and beams. But I could imagine what he was talking about. Sort of.

“Someday,” he said, “that will be our parish. Your mother and I are building it. What do you think?”

I didn’t think much. I wasn’t that impressed. What I thought was: I’m cold. Can we go home?

Well, about a year later, the church was finished: St. Patrick’s, in Rockville, Maryland. Somewhere in a shoe box I have the faded black and white pictures my father took that day. What those pictures contain is more than just the start of a building.

There, in the soaring arches, is the first outline of a gathering place for believers.

Under those arches, babies would be baptized. First communions would be given. Weddings would be blessed. Candles would be lit. Hymns would be sung. Rosaries would be prayed. The sanctuary would be filled with incense.

Within the stark outlines of what stood in that empty field, I would become an altar boy, and serve Mass, and carry the cross and ring the bells.

Year later, my mother’s coffin would be rolled down the aisle, and the white pall draped over her, and a chapter in my life would come to a close.

But I would remember the pride my father felt on that December day so many years earlier. “That will be our parish . . . your mother and I are building it.”

My parents were not rich, by any means. But I remember my father always faithfully stuffing bills into the church envelope, for the Sunday collection. And I know that’s what he meant when he talked about building the church. My parents, and hundreds of others like them, were making it possible. And it stands there today, over thirty years later, because of them, and so many others who came after them.

As we mark our stewardship weekend here at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs, I can’t help but think about the people who also built this parish, in an empty field, generations ago. How many envelopes were stuffed with small bills? How many people drove by Queens Boulevard and slowed down to watch the progress and said, like my father, “That will be our parish”? And how many others took pride in what their sacrifice was making possible? How many others thought: “I’m building that”?

The surprising fact is: the building isn’t over. The work that began all those decades ago continues. Every marriage, every baptism, every Easter Vigil that welcomes new members of the faith adds to our parish, and builds on what came before.

My prayerful wish for this weekend is that all of us consider what we can do to continue that great work. Keeping a parish like this one alive and thriving isn’t easy. It needs support—financial, as well as spiritual. A little sacrifice can yield great rewards—for us and for those who will come after us.

As I came to discover after that trip with my father, what begins with bricks and beams continues long after the roof has been raised.

The true building up—of faith, of belief, of a spiritual life that guides so many through all the passage of time and leads to salvation—that kind of construction never ends.

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