

24th Sunday After Pentecost, October 26, 2008, Liturgical Year “A”

ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

“A Legacy for Life”

50 YEARS!

Today we celebrate Fr. Amend’s fifty years of ordination to the priesthood. As many of you know, Fr. Amend was St. Bartholomew’s first rector. He had the privilege of seeing St. Bart’s go from a mission supported by the diocese to a self-sustaining parish. He served as St. Bartholomew’s priest and rector for 33 years retiring at the end of 1998. Fr. Amend told me that his first celebration as a priest was exactly 50 years to the day (he was ordained on Saturday October 25, 1958 and celebrated his first eucharist the next day (Sunday) How fitting.

It’s hard to believe that it has been three years since we celebrated St. Bartholomew’s fifty anniversary. The year was 1955 and two dozen members from the Church of the Advent in Kenmore received permission from Bishop Scaife to start a new congregation in the “countryside” of the Town of Tonawanda. Three years ago, I talked a bit about the legacy of St. Bart’s and I want to talk about that subject once more, but not just the legacy of our Church family, but the legacy of Fr. Amend as well as the legacy that we are all called to leave.

THE LEGACY WE LEAVE BEHIND

You see the word “legacy” literally refers to what you leave behind. What you leave behind when you are gone. And specifically what we leave behind after our time is over here on earth, after we die.

Often people don’t like to think about life in such terms because it brings them face to face with their own mortality – that this life is going to end and it forces us to come to terms with question of what is my purpose on life and is what I am doing making a difference.

I recall a few years ago during the height of the turmoil within the Episcopal Church and within our diocese asking the bishop if he was concerned about the legacy he left behind in our diocese. He looked at me and said, “I don’t think in those terms.”

Well you don’t have to think in those terms, but you will be leaving a legacy whether you like it or not. And frankly, when we don’t think in those terms, we are missing out. Because the Word of God is very clear. God is concerned about what we leave behind. Because what we leave behind has a direct correlation for what we receive in the Kingdom of God. How so? One might ask.

WHAT REALLY LASTS - TREASURES IN HEAVEN

Well let’s look at the Word of God to find the answer. Please turn to **Matthew 6:19-21**: ***“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”***

Now it’s ridiculous to simply lay up treasures on earth. You can’t take them with you. As the Job said in **Job 1:21**: ***“naked I came into this world and naked I will return.”*** It is not the physical stuff of

this world that is important. The Apostle Paul writes in **2 Cor. 4:16-18**: “*So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.*” Paul says we don’t look to the things that are seen. Why? They are passing away. But the things in heaven are eternal, they won’t pass away.

Now what exactly is the stuff that is passing away? Everything that you can see, taste, touch, hear, smell. And why is the stuff of this world can be such a stumbling block - What is the driving force behind the obsession that is this world of our ours?

THE WORLD IS PASSING AWAY

I Jn. 2:15-17: “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its lusts are passing away, but those who do the will of God will live forever.*” Did you catch that? The one who does the will of God lives forever. So what lasts forever? – the will of God. And how do you build up treasures in heaven? By doing the will of God. And how do you do the will of God? We heard it in our gospel lesson: love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul and love your neighbor as your self.

That, my friends is what abides forever. Do you think all that we have done wrong, all our shortcomings, insecurities, sins, and the wickedness of the world is going to abide forever? No. And if you glory in that type of thing, your end is sure, you are not going to last. What happens to all those who glory in such things? Their destiny is the lake of fire. Fire consumes, it burns up everything until there is nothing left. Please turn with me to **Rev. 21:1-8**.

Why is there a judgment in the first place? Remember last week we talked about God’s wrath. It flows from His judgment. There is a judgment before God where we will have to give an account for all that we have done while we were on earth. Now if you know Christ, you will not have to worry about God’s wrath or being condemned. We have been given salvation from God’s wrath and judgment because the Lord Jesus Christ took our place. That’s the good news. But we still will be judged in terms of how we lived our lives as Christians. There will be rewards and some will end up just getting into heaven by the hairs of their chinny chin chin.

In fact, the Bible is clear there will be different degrees of judgment. In other words, to much is given much is required. **James 3:1**: “*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*”

Now please turn with me to **1 Cor. 3:10-15**. St. Paul is talking about building on the sure foundation of Jesus Christ. And what we build onto it with our lives will ultimately be tested, tested by fire. Notice how Paul describes it (**read I Cor. 3:10-15**)

Some will escape God’s judgment but everything else they have done on earth will be “burned up.” You see we are to build upon the foundation that is Jesus Christ. And we build upon the foundation that is Christ by doing the will of God. It is the will of God and those who do God’s will that remain forever.

THE WILL OF GOD AND A GODLY EXAMPLE

So what does it mean to do the will of God? It refers to what do we do with our time, our talent and our treasure? Are you living your life, are you conducting your relationships, are you handling your wealth working in a way that God is glorified? Are you working on your relationships with your family, with your church family, with those whom you come in contact with? Because the truth is that it is only the good that we do for God and for others that will last my friends. That is the legacy we leave behind.

I mean take Fr. Amend, for example. He has left a legacy behind in this church family we call St. Bartholomew's. We are in many respects His legacy. Yes, we are here ultimately because of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. But we are also here because of one man's faithfulness. A man who not only said yes to the call of God on his life, but one who sought to love God and others with all his heart, mind, soul and strength.

That, my friends, is what lasts. The truth is we are called to bear much fruit: the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of changed lives, the fruit of good works, the fruit of bringing others into the Kingdom. That's what's eternal. Don't kid yourself. Everything else is passing away. And yet we get so worried about the stuff of this world. This is not our home – it's only a temporary abode and yet what we do here has eternal ramifications. It is awesome when you think about. And it can be overwhelming.

But God doesn't want us to be overwhelmed, He simply wants us to trust Him. To be faithful in what we know is right: to seek first the Kingdom and His righteousness, to love God and others as ourselves. It is not complicated. We just have to go and do it. And that, my friends, is what we are going to do when we move to our new church home in December.

We have been blessed by Fr. Amend's ministry, we have been blessed by this church family we call St. Bart's and we will continue to be blessed as we move forward to a new place to continue building upon the legacy we have been given, a legacy for life. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!