



Third Sunday after Epiphany (C)
Annual Meeting Sunday, January 24, 2010
Luke 4:14-21
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato

+O God, reveal yourself to us and open our minds and hearts to the knowledge and love of you, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

And Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Today, we, too, believe that the Spirit of the Lord is upon us as well. We gather week after week because we believe that when two or three are gathered in the Name of God, that God’s grace is even more abundant.

We continue to be aware of the need for God’s grace for our sisters and brothers in Haiti. As the days have worn on, a few miracles have happened each day but the hope for survivors dims. The stark and harsh reality of the loss of life, the unknown whereabouts of loved ones and friends, and the fallen and crumbled buildings are all reminders of a terrible tragedy of enormous proportions. Yet when a 72 year old woman was pulled from the rubble just a few days ago after being trapped for over a week, the rescue workers heard her singing to God. CNN reported that her faith had kept her alive.

Her story and similar stories have continued day after day. They are stories of hope in the midst of tragedy. They are stories of survival. They are stories of rescue workers unwilling to give up. All these stories are linked together through a mysterious web of love, care and concern. All these people are part of the body of Christ whether they recognize it or not.

We believe that we all connected, as Paul tells us in his Letter to the Corinthians, “Just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ...the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor.”

Paul tells us how we are to live, how we are to respect one another, how we are to tend those less fortunate, those trapped under rubble in Haiti, those in cycles of poverty or abuse, those trapped in unfilled jobs or by unemployment, those trapped by situations in life that are seemingly impossible to change. Through all this darkness, we believe there is light. We believe that the light of the Epiphany Season continues to shine through our hearts and minds filling us with hope, hope for the future.

Today, we not only gather around the Word and the Eucharist, but we gather as a community of faith, a Parish which has gathered for its Annual Meeting for over a hundred years. Annual Meeting Sunday is a great day to look back and give thanks to God for all the wonderful people and things that have transpired, signs of the Parish’s vitality. It is also an important time to focus on the future, as time is of the essence, as someone once said.

All Saints is in a particularly challenging time and has been for the several years. It is a time that calls us to a special focus, to think creatively with one another and to be steadfast in our commitment to God and the mission to which we as disciples of Jesus have been called, individually, and as a community.

For all the enthusiasm and commitment of the past year, All Saints is faced with a deficit budget and a shrinking endowment. It is in this moment that we ask God to give us the grace needed to face the challenge before us. We need to speak with truth about the focus, interactions, and faithful behavior that are greatly needed in order for the Parish to embrace its mission in a new way and move forward.

My report for the Annual Meeting chronicles an amazing list of achievements over the past year. We set out over a year ago with a rigorous agenda that has produced remarkable things because of the sincere dedication and commitment of a number of parishioners, people who give and give and who have given and given of their time, talents and monetary gifts for many years.

We can claim a number of achievements that include things such as a wonderful new sign -- a beacon to all passersby day and night -- a new organ, new children's Christian Education classrooms, new furniture in the Mission House, an expanded education program for adults that has been very successful, beautifully crafted and executed liturgies throughout the year, a renewed outward focus with food collections for the needy, monetary collections for food pantries, fundraisers that are also friendraisers, a Sunday each month which celebrates the children and youth of the Parish, the successful continuation of Manna Of Sound for Humanity, and the list goes on and on.

Overall giving on the part of 23 families has increased an average of 8.4% for 2010, which is amazing in today's economy. There are some who have yet not pledged or who have never pledged but who have been generous throughout the year, and for that we are very grateful. We invite our TV viewers to join us in offering what you can of your prayers and monetary gifts if the broadcast ministry of All Saints means a great deal to you. All Saints has been and remains an important part of the fabric of the local community but it also remains a fragile small Parish that works hard to survive and has managed to do so with God's grace.

Fragile means financially fragile but it also means fragile in terms of numbers of people who call this their Parish home. I'm pleased to report that attendance over the past year has been up over the past couple of years, and we are all very happy and enthusiastic about that. However, the Parish *needs* to grow. The Parish *must* grow. If we are to continue into the future as a strong and vital member of the body of Christ, we need to look carefully at who we are and what we need to do for future growth.

One thing is sure; God calls us as Christians to gather in worship and to love one another as God continues to love us. We call that being church. If All Saints faces the future with courage and resolve, God will be with us, working right alongside us, helping us to make things work.

With God's grace and benediction, All Saints can be successful in its call to make disciples of more and more people in the name of Christ. The Parish can take the mantle of challenge and wear it proudly, call upon God as its protector and shield and continue its ministry to love and serve God and all God's people. Amen!