

St. Thomas of Villanova
Closing of the parish retreat
Tuesday October 25, 2005

Tonight a parish retreat ends, but a parish mission begins. My work as the retreat director is over. Your work in undertaking a new mission begins. For three nights you have changed the rhythm of your lives and for ninety minutes you have slowed down your lives and your heart. In doing so you have learned to quiet inner voices that pull you away from God and the things of God, like hope, healing, happiness, and a heart free of fear, worry, hurt, etc.

You have heard some exciting things about your patron saint. Hopefully, what you heard confirms a truth that the name St. Thomas of Villanova is a good fit for your parish. He now lives among a "*Cloud of Witnesses*," but continues to watch over you and bless you for all you've done in forty-four years to uphold his legacy in the wonderful ways you bear his name as a Catholic faith community in Palatine, IL.

Yesterday morning I met with kids in the school grades four through eight. Yesterday afternoon I met with kids in the religious education program grades four through seven. We had a conversation about "*legacy*." I shared the definition of that word from the dictionary: "*something left by an ancestor in the past*." I mentioned some Chicago celebrities who left legacies: Harry Caray, Sammy Sosa, Michael Jordan, Phil Donohoe, Oprah Winfrey, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and Fr. James Rowley. They were unfamiliar with the last two so I challenged them to do a goggle search to find information on Cardinal Bernardin's legacy. And I challenged them to talk with their parents and grandparents to find information on Fr. Rowley. It is possible he married their parents, baptized their siblings and buried their grandparents. So, his legacy lives on in them.

These local people are remembered in Chicago because they lived in such a way that they left something of themselves behind for you to remember and keep alive by the way you live. Then I asked the children, what will your legacy be? How will you be remembered by people who follow you? I challenged them to *imagine* what difference they will make 50-60 years from now then come back to the present and make a plan to live their life in a way that makes a difference.

I told them that St. Thomas of Villanova left a legacy. He lived in a way that earned him sainthood. I tell you to encourage your children not to discount that as a legacy. Begin to imagine that you are not only raising children, but future saints. Thomas was born in Spain four years before Christopher Columbus discovered the America's. He was canonized in 1658. Three hundred and three years later he lives on in the name of your parish. Forty-four years later his legacy is alive in the many ways you serve the Church and in the many ways you reach out to the poor.

During the past two retreat services I shared some information about his life. I called them two pieces of his spiritual DNA that defined him as a servant of the Church and a lover of the poor. These were his legacies that earned him sainthood. These gospel virtues were how he lived the prophecy of Isaiah in tonight's first reading. His compassionate heart is how God anointed him to *"bring good news to the poor, heal broken hearts, free those imprisoned by fear, comfort the grieving and be the oil of gladness to those who mourn."*

I hope you know more about his legacy than before this retreat began. I also hope you know more about your legacy these past forty-four years. A piece of it is written in brick and mortar in the school, the hall, the Church and now God's Great Room. The dedication booklet for your new addition is a testimony to your love of the Church and your roots in the parish.

Tonight I want to challenge to rest from all the building, fund raising and physical labor. For the next year, be still and look within. Work at dreaming about an undiscovered piece of legacy that you can work at as you journey to your 50th anniversary in 2011. Lend me your imaginations and let's dream about the journey of the next six years.

September 22nd is your parish feastday. Let it be the marker day in this six year journey of spiritual renewal. Between October 26, 2005 and September 22, 2006 call together a *"Dream Team."* Let them fine tune this six year plan and present it to the Parish Council, the Finance Council, and all parish ministries. Invite them to share this dream with you and make a faith commitment to make it happen. The theme of your recent building project was *"Building God's Great Room."* Let the theme for the six year plan be called, *"Building Hope, Renewing Faith and Practicing Charity as we journey to our Jubilee Year."* Make a banner with this theme and hang it in the Great Room. The foundational piece for this six year plan is establishing a Jubilee Fund. Its purpose is to have money available each year for new ministries and faith formation for those who will guide them.

From September 22, 2006 to 2007 dream about a new Ministry of Spiritual Direction. Call twelve people to go into formation for this ministry at the Institute for Spiritual Leadership at CTU. One half of their formation should be covered by the Jubilee Fund and the other half from the candidate. Twice a year bring in experts to give *"Spirituality Days"* on the ministry of Spiritual Direction. I invite Shirley Konczak to make a banner naming the theme for each of the six years. It should be small enough that it can be carried to meetings and gatherings so parishioners can reflect on the theme and hold it in pray for that year.

From September 22, 2007-2008 dream about a new Evangelization Ministry. Once again call twelve people to undergo a year of faith formation for lay Catholic Evangelization. Those who need to be evangelized are inactive, hurting, angry Catholics in a post-scandal Church. You know who they are because they live in your neighborhoods and on your streets. They are the ones who chose to leave this faith family while you chose to stay. Twice a year have "*Spirituality Days*" for the parish around the theme of Catholics evangelizing non-practicing Catholics. As before pay for this formation and the spirituality days out of the Jubilee Fund.

From September 22, 2008-2009 dream about a new Healing Ministry. Once again call twelve people to undergo a year of faith formation as Wounded Healers in a Wounded Church. The sequence of these two new ministries is important. First, we must re-evangelize the inactive, hurting Catholic. Then, we must have some way for them to heal before welcoming them back home. That means every parishioner must see themselves as a Wounded Healer. So the parish must be re-evangelized also. Twice a year sponsor "*Spirituality Days*" so all parishioners can learn about how to spiritually heal people of memories, hurts, and grudges. Eventually, the evangelization ministers and the healing ministers must collaborate in reaching out to hurting, neglected parishioners and help them find a new way to come back home.

From September 22, 2009-2010 dream about a new Vocations Ministry. It is time that vocations be framed within the metaphor of the Church needing Wounded Healers. Call twelve people to undergo a year of formation for a Vocations Ministry. These are the ones who have hearts that notice how the hearts of some young people are open to serving God as priests, religious, missionaries and lay ministers. These are the ones who help those young people look in their own hearts deeper. They collaborate with the spiritual directors and suggest that these young people have group spiritual direction around a call from God. Just like schools have guidance counselors helping your children make decisions about colleges and careers, so parishes should have spiritual directors helping young people pray about a call to serve the Church. These people should be encouraged to serve for a year in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps or spend one year after graduation from college serving at a Catholic mission in a third world country. The method Jesus used to form twelve fishermen into disciples is that he invited them to journey with him. On the way their hearts were converted and we are the beneficiaries of their legacy. As always twice a year sponsor "*Spirituality Days*" for youth and those in career transitions. I suggest you invite Fr. Chris Devron to lead one of these days. He is a vocation from this parish and as a Jesuit priest serves at Regis High School in New York City. As always, the commitment to this piece of the six year dream is made possible by the Jubilee Fund.

From September 22, 2010 to 2011 dream about publishing and distributing a history of your parish as a Gospel. Call it *"The Gospel of Jesus Christ as lived by St. Thomas of Villanova Parish in Palatine, IL."* By 2011 it will have fifty chapters, one for each year of your faith life. The opening verse of chapter one should be *"In the beginning just twelve and one half acres of land."* This is the caption of a picture taken from a one page summary of your history which Ron Schaefer gave me yesterday. There are still a few founding parishioners living among you. They need to contribute to the first five chapters before those memories die with them. And if that happens then a piece of your founding legacy is lost. Chapters five through eight should be written by parishioners who remember the emergence of new parish ministries following Vatican II in the mid and late 60's. Chapter fifty should focus on your Jubilee year. So start writing your history as gospel early enough that you can hear the stories of the founders who know them. When it is completed then copies should be given to every parishioner and every new parishioner who can celebrate their identity with you through your lived gospel as a parish. Copies should be given to the teenagers in the Confirmation program. Let this be part of your legacy to them so they can claim the gifts of the Holy Spirit and keep the legacy alive. Pay for this project out of the Jubilee Fund so that your parish as gospel is a gift to be celebrated and not a book to be purchased.

Finally, the theme of your Jubilee year (September 2011-2012) should be *"Pilgrimage."* Let this be a year of homecoming, rest and faith journeys. Once a month during the anniversary year sponsor *"Homecoming"* Sundays. Invite those parishioners who were part of your legacy, but have moved away to come home and celebrate with you. Give them a copy of your history as gospel during the weekend Masses they attend. Take pilgrimages to Spain during the Jubilee year. Visit the birthplace of your patron saint. Celebrate Mass in the Church where he was baptized. Visit Valencia and pray at his tomb in the Cathedral. Visit Avila and pray at the tomb of the great Spanish mystic, St. Theresa. Visit the Carmelite Monastery and pray at the tomb of St. John of the Cross, the author of *"Dark Night of the Soul."* Visit Manresa and the cave where St. Ignatius wrote the Spiritual Exercises. Challenge your children in the sixth grade to save \$1 a day for the next six years. Then in their senior year they can take this pilgrimage with you. Give them an opportunity to reverence their spiritual roots and give St. Thomas of Villanova a chance to inspire them to live their lives in a way that they leave a legacy of faith, hope and service. For those who can't afford a pilgrimage to Spain sponsor a charter bus trip to Villanova University in Philadelphia. Celebrate Mass in the campus Church which is also the parish of St. Thomas of Villanova. Invite one of the Augustinian monks to give a retreat day. Drive ten miles into the city and visit the Shrine of St. John Neumann. Drive thirty miles north and visit the Shrine of St. Katharine Drexel. Drive two hours southwest and visit the Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and the Gettysburg Battlefield just eight miles north. Visit St. Francis Xavier Church in Gettysburg which was converted into a hospital where the Sisters of Charity nursed both Union and Confederate soldiers.

These are some dreams for you to dream about as we end this retreat. Like the two disciples in the Emmaus story reading I hope you have recognized the Lord walking with you these past two days. I pray your hearts are now burning within about the dreams you can help make happen for the next six years. And I believe in you to tell others what you have seen and heard so they can join you in bringing to life the gospel of your parish as you complete the first fifty chapters in time for your great Jubilee in 2011. Amen.