

HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
REDEDICATION OF BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHEDRAL
MARCH 25, 2003

Your Eminence, Cardinal George; Archbishop Montalvo, Apostolic Nuncio and representative of our Holy Father; my brother Bishops and Priests, Deacons, Religious; Archbishop Nicholas and Ecumenical Guests; Monsignor Robinson and members of Blessed Sacrament Cathedral Parish; my Brothers and Sisters from the entire Archdiocese of Detroit:

“We shall go up with joy to the house of the Lord!”

Even as our world is overshadowed by the darkness and tragedy of war, we, the Church of Detroit, gather with hope and gratitude here in our newly restored Mother Church to celebrate God’s abiding presence and love. On this feast of the Annunciation, we rejoice in the way God chose to dwell among us in the womb of the Virgin Mother, announcing *to* her and *through* her the beginning of our salvation.

We praise God for His continuing presence among us in Word and Sacrament, especially in the gift of his Body and Blood in the most Blessed Sacrament, the mystery of our faith to which our Cathedral is dedicated. On this occasion, we reflect on the significance of church buildings and cathedrals where we gather to renew our covenant with Him and one another as His holy, priestly, and prophetic people. In union with other believers and people of goodwill everywhere, we pray for peace and pledge to be instruments of the reign of God, a kingdom of truth, justice, love and peace.

Many of us have known and loved Blessed Sacrament Cathedral as our “second home” for many decades. Some have been ordained priests and bishops in this sacred place; many were baptized and married here. We have celebrated significant funerals and other archdiocesan events in this very space, especially the glorious moment when we welcomed our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, on September 18, 1987. For nine decades now, this Norman Gothic Cathedral has graced Woodward Avenue as a structure of historic beauty; originally a parish church, since 1938 it has served as our Cathedral.

Exquisite in every detail of workmanship and with outstanding stained glass windows, because of its heavy stone walls and vaulted ceiling, our Cathedral always tended to be rather dark. Thanks to the talent of our architect, Gunnar Birkerts, the dignity and majesty of this original structure has been preserved, while at the same time, making it into a place of light, especially with its expanded north entrance.

This theme of “light” is an appropriate reflection for this feast of the Annunciation when our world, overshadowed by war, death, and violence, desperately seeks some encouragement and consolation from the Good News of salvation. As we heard in the first reading for the feast, at a time of terrible darkness for the Jewish people seven centuries before Christ, the prophet Isaiah offered a simple but hope-filled sign from the Lord – the promise that a child, an heir to the throne, would indeed be born. In the Gospel from St. Luke, this promise reaches an amazing fulfillment beyond all imaging as the Virgin Mother becomes the dwelling place of the Lord. Unlike Ahaz, who was closed to the revelation and gift of God, the Blessed Virgin was willing to accept a mystery; she allowed her life and destiny to be completely enveloped by the mystery of God’s light.

In today's second reading, a passage from the Letter to the Hebrews, we come to understand the source of the new light of Christ – that is, His complete and perfect obedience. Just as the *disobedience* of Adam and Eve brought sin and violence in the world, the obedience of Christ, the new Adam, and Mary, the new Eve, opened the way for a whole new creation. We, today, celebrate the mystery of Christ's perfect love for the Father and all of us in this Holy Eucharist, as we share soon in the mystery of His sacrificial Death and glorious Resurrection. In this Lenten season, in keeping with last Sunday's Gospel, we pray that, even as *this* building is rededicated, the temple of our own bodies might also be more fully consecrated to the Lord by heart-filled obedience.

Since there is a parallel between the Lord's presence within our hearts and His presence in church buildings, a cathedral dedication ceremony is modeled on the initiation of a Christian. And so, we began with a sprinkling rite, recalling the waters of Baptism that wash away sin and bring about a new source of goodness within us, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Very appropriately, our new marble baptismal font will allow for full immersion of the believer joining the Church, a vivid sign of the totality of the committed response we are all called to give the Lord, according to the gifts and challenges of our state in life.

Having listened to God's Word and, in response to that Word, we will call upon the help of the saints, remembering and renewing our communion with God's holy people of every time and place, the mystery of the heavenly liturgy of which our gathering today is a foreshadowing.

Our dedication ceremony reaches a high point in the consecration of the new altar, the place of sacrifice and table for the meal of the Holy Eucharist. With the help of my auxiliaries, the walls of this Cathedral church will also be blessed with Chrism in twelve different places, reminding us of the foundation on which we build – the twelve apostles of the lamb.

A cathedral is, of course, unique inasmuch as it takes its designation from the cathedra, or chair of the bishop, the place from which I and my successors will shepherd this local Church, presiding at the most Holy Eucharist and teaching the flock according to the pastoral needs of our times.

Once the altar and walls of the Cathedral have been consecrated, our liturgy will continue with the offering of the holy sacrifice of Christ Himself, the very purpose for which the altar was consecrated. After we have all shared in the mystery of our communion with the Lord and one another in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, we will then process with the Blessed Sacrament to the new Eucharistic reservation chapel. This chapel will provide a setting for personal prayer and will honor the abiding presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The newly suspended sanctuary lamp, restored from forty years ago, will be kept ever-burning from this day forward as a reminder that Christ is “that light which no darkness can extinguish.”

Within just a few weeks, a wide representation of the 1.5 million Catholics of our local Church will be gathering here yet again for our annual Chrism Mass, as I will bless the holy oils for the catechumens and the sick and consecrate the sacred Chrism. As is fitting, the ambry for housing these oils – signs of my pastoral care of this archdiocese – will now be prominently displayed.

The rededication of our “Mother Church” is a special moment in the history of our Church and opens a whole new chapter in our 170-year history. Today’s celebration and ceremony proclaims our abiding commitment to presence and ministry within the heart of the city, near to our Seminary, and right in the midst of a neighborhood. This rededication ceremony happily coincides not only with the feast of the Annunciation, but also falls during the holy season of Lent, our annual period of preparation for Easter. We are reminded that even as this

building has been rededicated, we ourselves must be renewed through prayer and penance, responding to Christ's call for continual conversion.

This newly renovated Mother Church of the Archdiocese of Detroit and its exterior plaza will be a sign of hospitality, welcome, and outreach to all in need – in body or spirit. From this altar where we will daily celebrate “breaking of the bread,” we will find the source and energy for all ministry within the church itself and within the wider society as we work with all others of goodwill for the defense of human life and the cause of peace and justice for all.

The presence of Archbishop Montalvo, the representative of our Holy Father, and so many other bishops today vividly symbolizes our communion with the Church throughout the world. The presence of many leaders of other faith backgrounds and also our leaders of civic government, remind us that our Church proclaims the Annunciation in the midst of a very complex and diverse society. And so it is this very day, we lift our voices and hearts in fervent prayer for peace throughout the world, especially in the Middle East. We beseech the intercession of our Lady Queen of Peace for a rapid resolution to the conflict in Iraq, and we pledge to one another to work and pray for a true and lasting peace in our world, in our city, and in our families.

May the God of peace and light shine *upon* us and *through* us, and *like* Mary, and *with* Mary, may each of us proclaim and live our response to the challenging Good News of the angel, saying wholeheartedly, “*Let it be done to me according to your Word...*”

Yes, “*Let us go up to the House of the Lord. Let us go up to the House of the Lord with joy.*” Amen.