

BLESSED KATERI CHURCH

November 12, 2006

Dear Parishioners of Blessed Kateri,

As I write this letter to you in the aftermath of last Sunday's very exciting, inspiring, and enjoyable ground-blessing and ground-breaking ceremonies after each Mass, I am very grateful to God for all his favors to us, and delighted to thank some very special people:

- Bishop Dominick Lagonegro, whose infectious joy and warm leadership brightened our 10:30 celebration
- Peter McFadden, father and son, who built and erected the impressive cross now standing in the field, marking the sanctuary area of our new church
- The Dutchess County Sheriff's Office, for providing us with a traffic officer, and John Scianimanico and John Moylan, for taking care of interior congestion
- Dave Tesoro for videotaping and Diane McCoach for photographing major moments of the day
- Bob Horton, for securing the podium we needed for the outdoor ceremony
- John Recchia, Rosemary Archer, Kathryn Sharp, Joan Crowe, and all who provided the donuts and other goodies in the meeting hall area of the land
- All of you, who grasped the significance of that moment in history, and will continue pray for good fortune and a great result as the building process begins with the laying of cement foundations in just a few weeks.

Time runs fast and many things have to happen simultaneously in our personal and public lives. I have to be conscious of Thanksgiving Day coming on November 23, Advent beginning on December 3, and Christmas Day falling on a Monday – and having the church be appropriately decorated for all of these special times.

In the recent past, two couples – Ella and Jerry Murphy, and Elaine and John Stevko – did wonderful volunteer work with flowers and decorating. But the Stevkos have moved, and the Murphys are moving soon, so I would be happy to hear from other parishioners with the talent and time to be part of a committee for these great works.

Time is also eternal. Even with our focus on the historic events happening here this fall, I have been offering you some reflections from God's revelation about what happens to the immortal soul of a person who dies, and how we can still help one another after his/her death.

Too many people live as if there will be no death for them or their loved ones. Some then fall apart when the reality of mortal life stares at them from the coffin. It should not happen that way; in my experience, it does not happen as much for people who have embraced Jesus Christ and invested their time, talent and treasure in the work of knowing and spreading the Gospel.

For Jesus Christ defeats death! No one else ever has, ever can. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the Bread of Life, the Good Shepherd, the Redeemer who died on the cross so that all people could be rescued from their sins and their many acts of denial, and thus finally can accept the awesome chance to live forever in heaven. Because of Jesus, Catholics firmly believe that those who try to love and serve God while they live on earth, especially if they repent of their sins, will definitely be saved from eternal punishment, and will in God's time be welcomed into the eternal joy of heaven.

Therefore faithful followers of Jesus do not have to fear death and judgment; we have the blessed assurance of God's fidelity and mercy.

But we also have painful knowledge of our human imperfections, and we see many degrees of goodness and of evil among us. Frankly, some people will need a lot of forgiveness and a lot of help to get into heaven anytime soon after they die. They came late to righteousness, and dragged a lot of baggage.

We believe that those who die very young – for example, the unborn babies, tiny babies, young children, mentally handicapped persons who don't know right from wrong – they will see God without delay. They have committed no sins. They have nothing to answer for.

But those of us who have the capacity to sin, and have used our freedom to do so: we have much more of a challenge, because we have offended God and have hurt one another, and do not deserve to be judged so gently.

Therefore, even though we will be saved, we have to undergo a period of cleansing from the effects of the sins we did choose to commit. This is called purgatory. The great remedy to leave purgatory quickly is intercessory prayer. The greatest intercessory prayer we have is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which renews the sacrifice which Jesus himself offered for us and for all people by his death on the cross on Calvary.

Therefore the body (or even in necessity the ashes) of a deceased Catholic should certainly be brought to a Catholic Church, and his/her soul should be prayed for at a Funeral Mass, with the presence and participation of as many family and friends as possible.

Obvious, you might say; everyone knows to do this. But arranging for a Mass and asking mourners to gather in a Catholic church for prayers for the person who has died is not always the choice of a non-practicing family. Sometimes it is not done by the family even if the deceased person absolutely wanted it, and even though prayer is our best gift and only real assistance to loved ones who have died.

Then, after the Funeral Mass and burial rites, it is right and just, as well as a loving custom, for family and friends to continue to pray for the soul of the deceased person, especially on special days like anniversaries. Mass cards, requested at the rectory, and then brought to the wake or mailed to the home, are a very traditional way for friends and family to pray for the soul of the deceased and for the consolation of mourners. Attending these Masses has often brought mourners out of their isolation and into new appreciation of God's gift of love and eternal life.

Time moves at its own speed. The leaves have fallen in our November landscape, but the seeds of next spring's growth are in the ground already. Especially in a secular society, the seeds of faith in Jesus Christ must be planted by responsible Catholic parents, and watered often by three things: example, prayers, and sometimes even tears of repentance and promises of reform.

May we not be afraid of death, but always face it with the help of our Lord. Believe that Jesus has great things in store later on for those who trust in him now.

Faithfully yours in Christ,
Msgr. William Belford