

2nd Friday in Advent
December 10, 2010
Fr. Joe Bambenek
St. Stanislaus Kostka Church, Winona

Isaiah 48:17-19

Psalms 1

Matthew 11:16-19

It is a privilege and joy to celebrate Mass with you here this morning in this beautiful church. As I mentioned at the start of Mass, my name is Fr. Joe Bambenek. I was ordained about 6 months ago as a priest of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. In fact, this is exactly my 250th Mass as a priest. Today I come here to St. Stan's to celebrate Mass, and to celebrate one of my post-ordination Masses of Thanksgiving, because according to our family stories, my great, great grandfather, August Bambenek, was one of the Polish immigrants who helped start this wonderful parish and build this beautiful church. It seemed fitting, then, that I should return here to give thanks to God for the gift of my priesthood, as I also give thanks for the gift of faith that has been passed down to me, that has been nurtured through the generations of my family.

When I looked at the readings the Church sets forth for today, they seemed especially fitting for this celebration. In the first reading, I was struck with the last few verses: which focus on the descendants of those who follow God's commands. Since I did not know my great-great grandfather August personally, nor do I know a great deal about his life, I can't speak to his overall moral character. However, I can safely say that August's faith was important enough to him that he was a part of starting something so beautiful; and that there is something to be said that his great-great grandson has returned here as a priest.

The gospel, too, is quite fitting. We hear Jesus reproving those who seem to want to do nothing but complain. He takes after the people who are quick to be critical; who don't like what they have but are also quick to assert that new things that cannot be done without giving ideas on what should be done; who seem to just want the *status quo* so that they can complain about it. How different were our ancestors who started this parish and built this church building. First of all, they could have sat around Poland and complained about the difficulties or lack of opportunities that they were facing in our mother land. But instead, they did something about their plight. They took a risk: they left what was familiar to start a new life. When they arrived in Winona, halfway around the globe from the place they knew, they did not forget what was most important: they did not forget their Catholic identity. When they arrived here, they needed a church. Once again, they did not complain that there was no church in which they could worship in Polish. Instead of deciding that they might just as well sleep in on Sunday morning, look what they built! Look at the beauty of what they worked together in faith to build; they worked together to build a foretaste of heaven. And think of the sacrifices that it took to build this! What a legacy of faith they have left us! How proud must Jesus have been for them, to see their sacrificial love for Him. Just as Jesus was love incarnate; this building is an incarnation of the love and faith of August and his contemporaries at St. Stan's. Jesus was undoubtedly also pleased that they were not like those in today's gospel who he reproved. How, instead, to adapt Jesus' words, they were like the wise who are vindicated by their works.

Which then turns the challenge to us. What type of life are we living? Are we zealously and sacrificially seeking to live out our faith, to be people who live out God's commands? Or do we like to cut corners whenever we can; diluting our witness by watering-down our lives through

sin, like a dishonest painter might water down a can of paint? Are we content to sit back and complain about everything that is wrong in the world, everything wrong in our Church, perhaps at this very moment even thinking: why won't that young priest be quiet – he's already gone on too long for a daily Mass homily? By the way we live our lives, what example are we setting for the future generations? While we certainly cannot control the lives of our descendents, are we living in a way that would make a great-great grandchild of ours want to be a priest or a religious? Would they want to live as a Catholic wife or husband based upon what they see in our marriages?

As we leave this church today, let us be resolved to follow the example of our ancestors; may our very lives be a beautiful, incarnational foreshadowing of heaven on Earth, as is this beautiful church, built through the faith and sacrifice of our ancestors. Let us be the good examples to the next generations that our ancestors were to us, so that one day, it may be said of us: that our works have vindicated wisdom.

Mass Intentions for Friday, December 10

For all in the Church, that we may fulfill Jesus' mission with faith and zeal, rather than be complaining and be complacent, we pray to the Lord,

For the leaders of the United States and of Poland, that they will govern in keeping with the special spiritual heritage of their countries, we pray to the Lord,

For our natural and spiritual descendents, that they may live their Catholic faith with love and wisdom, we pray to the Lord,

For all who have birthdays in December, especially Joann, Lyle, Tara, Allie, Vince, Robbie and Meg, that they may live out their lives with the love and the joy of the most important December baby, Jesus, we pray to the Lord,

For those who are sick or undergoing surgery, that Jesus the good physician may guide the hands of the doctors, nurses and surgeons, and grant those suffering His peace and rest, we pray to the Lord,

For all who have died, especially for all who played a role in starting and building this beautiful church which serves as a foretaste of heaven, that they may joyfully experience the fulfillment of heaven for eternity, we pray to the Lord.