

# Reflecting Heaven

## Notes on the OLMC Sanctuary Renovation

### Part 13: The Lenten Journey

*Dust, dust, and more dust!* Dust in the air, dust on the floor, dust when I breathe in to sing, dust on everything I touch. Anyone who's done a renovation project in their home knows that dust becomes their constant companion on the journey, like an un-detachable sidecar. Our church renovation is no exception. The folks on our construction crew make heroic efforts to eliminate all the dust they can. Each Monday morning all the pews are covered over with plastic sheeting, and the altar, organ, piano, and music equipment are also protected. Late each Friday afternoon everything is wiped down and mopped to prepare for Sunday.



Despite all these diligent efforts, the knees in my suit trousers are still dingy with dust after kneeling on the floor at Sunday Masses. And last Saturday I put two young people to work rinsing everything from the choir chairs to the microphone cables, trying to free them from the coating of dust for a while. Still, the dust persists and remains.

What a great blessing, then, that God grants us this season of Lent precisely at this time in our renovation. "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" are the

words we hear when our foreheads are smeared with ash and dust at the outset of the Forty Days. The words and symbols all through Lent help us remember that our bodies are, at the end of our earthly sojourn, bound back to the dirt from which we came. We like to forget death and avoid mention of it, but...the dust persists; the dust remains.

The Lent of 2017 is a unique opportunity at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. Even in the best of times (i.e. non-renovation years), the sanctuary and nave become starker, with a minimum of decoration. The music becomes sparer, with fewer instruments and less ornamentation. Why is this? Well, it's a form of healthy self-denial or mortification, just like our Lenten sacrifices and fasting. It helps us recall that our true home is not on this earth, but rather in the heavenly Kingdom, the Realm of the Holy Trinity.

And that is, in fact, the point of this whole renovation project! The theologians tell us there is no such thing as "ugliness," but only the absence of beauty. For a few months, then, we trudge through an extended "architectural Lent" in which our nave and sanctuary are, shall we say, lacking in physical beauty. But, God willing, the finished project at Easter will be a daily reminder that our true home lies in the presence of God in heaven. The shapes, materials, textures, colors, light, and sound will work together to remind us that celebrating the Mass together is the closest thing we yet have to our heavenly home.

The final verse of the great Lenten hymn "Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days" expresses our prayer beautifully: "*Abide with us, that when this life of suffering is past, an Easter of unending joy we may attain at last!*"