

## **August 12, 2012 (Re)Opening Mass of St. Adalbert/OLBS**

One of the first things I was privileged to do as pastor of St. Adalbert –Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament was to visit Aurelia Elliott at Euclid General Hospital. I was eager to meet her. Long before I knew I would be serving as her pastor I thought that she and I shared something in common and I wanted to sit down and talk with her about it.

You see, almost three years ago I read a story in the Plain Dealer about the closing of this church. In that article Aurelia told the story of her mother, Nell Mary Shealey, who had just moved to Cleveland from Indianapolis. When Nell went to Mass at the old St. Agnes on Euclid Avenue some 85 years ago, the priest from the parish politely told her that the Colored Catholic Church was down 79<sup>th</sup> St. He didn't know the name of the church, but told her to just walk down 79<sup>th</sup> and she would find it.

When I read that story I thought of my grandparents, sharecropper immigrants from southeastern Poland. On a Sunday afternoon – probably around the same time that Nell Mary was ushered out of St. Agnes -- they made a visit to the cultural gardens in Rockefeller Park. While they were there they heard the bells from the old St. Thomas Church on Ansel and Superior announcing that Sunday afternoon devotions were about to begin – so they made their way from the gardens to the church to pray but, as they climbed the front steps, someone overheard them talking to each other in Polish. An usher stopped them at the front door and told that they needed to find another church. He had no idea if my grandparents were Polish, Slovenian, Lebanese, or Martian, but told them GO! There was a church for them somewhere down the road.

Aurelia and I shared our stories – and I think I made a new friend that day.

So here we are – descendants of faith filled African Americans and the grandson of Polish Immigrants – in many ways worlds apart, and yet today and together we have something to announce and celebrate.

The good news we share is that the church for African American Catholics is not down the street anymore. Once again, it is here.

The church for immigrants and refugees is not somewhere down the road anymore. It is here.

The church for those who struggle with the burdens of daily living, who battle with poverty -- who are unwanted, unwelcomed, unappreciated. -- the church for those blessed in any way -- that church is not down the street. That church is not in another part of town. That church is neither in some other neighborhood nor in some other city. Because St. Adalbert/Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament is that Church. We are that Church and that Church gathers here.

We have a struggle ahead of us - a huge mountain to climb. To regroup, rebuild, and begin again is not going to be easy. I will be honest with you -- I am a more than a little apprehensive -- more than a little nervous. Despite that I can promise you three things today. I will struggle along with you and for you. I will work side by side with you and for you as hard as I can to make this effort succeed. I will pray with you and for you every single day and ask you, beginning today, to do the same for me.

Because this is what I believe. This is what gives me courage in the struggle and provides me with strength for the climb:

St. Adalbert -- Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament will be holy if you and I are people of prayer.

It will be -- far and wide - renowned as welcoming, if you and I greet each other and every visitor as if we were greeting the Lord himself.

It will receive countless others to fill its benches if you and I make every effort to ask and invite them.

It will be known as Christ-like if you and I remember to see Him, and serve Him and love Him in the poor, the hungry, the prisoner, and the very least of his sisters and brothers

And, above all, I believe this. St. Adalbert -- Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament will be a great parish where Jesus is exalted, praised, honored, blessed, worshipped, and glorified -- If you and I make up our minds today -- this morning -- at this mass that that is exactly what we -- as a parish are -- with the help of God - going to be.

So, are you with me?

OK, let's begin.