

Last week members of our building and renovation committee met with the diocesan building commission and our architectural firm GLPM to review our final construction documents. We got the green light we were hoping for. GLPM now has all the information it needs to put our project out to bid, which could happen as early as this week. After 3 or 4 weeks a contractor will be chosen. Groundbreaking for the addition on the front of our building could happen as early as April, but to be realistic, everything so far has taken longer than we thought it would take. At some point this year we will pull up the pews here and move mass over to the gym in St. Rita's while renovations happen to the church interior. I want to thank all of you for your support and prayers. The more you contribute to this effort now, the smaller our debt and its interest will be. Jesus is helping me out with today's gospel, where he says "Blessed are you who are poor; but woe to you who are rich." If you are afraid you may have too much money, St. Munchin's can assist you with your problem.

Several sayings in this gospel just sound wrong. Jesus takes something you think should be true, and he turns it completely around. This happens elsewhere in the gospels, in passages where God casts down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly; where the first shall be last and the last shall be first; and where the prodigal son is welcomed home after squandering everything. All of this sets the stage for the greatest reversal of the gospels: Jesus dies on the cross, but he rises from the tomb. Just when it appears that all is lost, God shows us hope: how wonderful things actually are.

So in Luke's version of the beatitudes, the poor are blessed, not the rich; the hungry are blessed, not those who are full; the weeping are blessed, not those who laugh; and those who are denounced are blessed, not those who are praised. This must have been welcome news to the people who first heard it, a crowd of poor, hungry people, suffering from need and the neglect of those who could have helped them.

Even today, we tend to think that those who have more are blessed more; and we need the reminder about what brings true happiness. Last summer several of us visited our sister parish, Our Lady of Fatima, in Marambo, Tanzania. We were struck again and again by how poor the people were, but how welcoming they were, how freely they shared what little they had, and how happy they were to see us. As Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours."

We all go through times when we can't pay our bills, have to skip a meal, cry uncontrollably, or put up with the words of bullies. In those times we are tempted to say God has abandoned us. But God turns things around. In the midst of our emptiness, God can fill us with a new appreciation of who we are and what we have: our faith, our life and our love.