

This past week I attended a meeting of the organ committee at the Catholic cathedral in Kansas City. We are preparing for the installation of a refurbished Italian pipe organ there sometime next year. I hadn't been in the cathedral since it closed about a year ago for renovations. But before our meeting adjourned, we went in to see the progress.

It is a construction site in there. All the pews have been removed. Scaffolding is up. The new balcony is nearly complete. Old side doors have been walled up. Old windows have been opened up. New arches are in place and paint samples are up on the ceiling.

From what I can see, it's going to be beautiful. It will provide a noble setting where Catholics across our diocese can worship. We have kept the old historic building, but we are redoing the inside. The choir loft will be lower. The altar will be more forward. The baptismal font is near the sanctuary. We are honoring our past, while we make changes for the present: something old and something new.

At the end of the parables, Jesus praises the scribe who honors the new and the old. He says every scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from the storeroom both the new and the old. A good home will have some heirlooms, and it will also have new purchases. Good followers of Jesus will honor the roots of their faith, the old traditions handed down from one generation to the next, but they will also honor the new teaching that comes from Jesus. In the early church many Jews had become Christians. Jesus praised them for retaining some customs even while they accepted a new way of life.

Some scholars think this saying about the good scribe portrays the author of Matthew's gospel. The writer may have been a scribe who kept some of the old traditions while recording the new sayings of Jesus. This gospel frequently quotes the Old Testament to show that Jesus fulfills it. Matthew's gospel brings out the old and the new. Almost every Sunday of the year at church, before we hear the gospel, we hear a first reading from the Old Testament that somehow foreshadows it. We bring from the storehouse both the old and the new.

The United States is a young country compared to other nations. We are encouraged to buy what is new but to throw out what is old because it has little value – whether it's an 8 track player, an Edsel, a wood stove or a grandmother. Jesus is not opposed to what is new. He himself was new. He liked the blend.