

25 yrs old (save with wife)

In the spring of 1978 I was studying theology at Kenrick Seminary in St. Louis. My telephone finally rang with a call I'd been expecting. Father Joe Mancuso from Kansas City was calling to tell me where Bishop Sullivan would like me to work the summer and spring before I was ordained a priest the following year. I grew up in Kansas City. As an organist I'd visited a lot of our churches, and as a seminarian I knew a lot of our priests. I imagined that when Fr. Mancuso told me where I was going I'd be either very happy or very nervous.

He said to me, "Paul, we've found a parish for you." I thought, "All right. Here it comes." "We'd like you to go to St. Mark's in Independence." Silence on my end of the phone. "Do you know St. Mark's in Independence?" "I didn't know there was a St. Mark's in Independence." I didn't feel happy or nervous--I felt ignorant. "Well," Fr. Mancuso continued, "the pastor there is Fr. Don Miller." Silence on my end of the phone. "Do you know Father Miller?" I didn't know there was a Fr. Miller. "Maybe you know their associate, Fr. Healy." My silence was shorter. "I've heard a little about Fr. Healy." But I didn't tell him what I'd heard. *Thanks to Healy: direction, insight, humor*

During my time at St. Mark's I met with groups, I socialized with parishioners, and I visited the sick. As I look back, I can say now that several things were important to you. Hospitality: You wanted visitors to feel welcome here. Vocations: You wanted to encourage men to try the priesthood. Prayer: You wanted better liturgy and music than you had. Education: You wanted your children to love the Gospel. You had a dream about your parish and it became my dream too.

For me, coming to St. Mark's was literally a dream come true. I'd always dreamt about becoming a priest. Spending twelve years in the seminary prepared me for the dream, but it distanced me from it, too. When I came here as an intern, I felt like a long distance swimmer who had just raised his head out of the water for a breath of air. And all of a sudden I could see the goal I had in mind when I started. Here was a real Christian community, and it was exciting to be part of it. *build on dream*

Today's first reading is the story of how God's chosen people were carried off to slavery in Babylon and then were suddenly released to begin rebuilding their temple. The reading stops there where the dream begins. ² Now they could start being a community again. *people may not have known each other*

My prayer for you all is that you keep your dream alive. You dreamed about a parish community where Mass is exciting, visitors seek you out, and you return to the Church the fruits of your faith. It was a glorious dream, a long-distance dream, but it's worth the work to make it real. God has given us a great opportunity in this Church: Here we can believe, here we can share, here we can grow.

You and I, we didn't know each other back in 1978, and many of us still don't know each other, but we can still build a beautiful temple for the Lord, a community of faith that gives life to the world.