

## Our Lady of the Lake Dedicated on Highway 57

By Father John Geaney, C.S.P.

“The last time I stood in Our Lady of the Lake, it was black.” Rev. Dick Haley, Minister of Pickwick United Methodist Church, was helping the community at Our Lady of the Lake remember the day that their Church had burned. He described how people were moving in and out of the charred remains carrying sacred objects of worship, gathering themselves between fits of tears to go back in and find what might still remain, and as one group of people approached him he recalls saying, “If you need a place of worship, you can come to our house.” Rev. Haley was addressing the people gathered to celebrate the dedication of Our Lady of the Lake, people who had worshipped for a time in the space he offered that sad night. But now there was a new church in a new place and he said, “In the name of Jesus Christ, prosper and proclaim the gospel to all of God’s children in this neighborhood.”

On March 29, Our Lady of the Lake on Highway 57 in Counce was dedicated by Bishop J. Terry Steib, S.V.D. “We’re not here to maintain,” the Bishop said. “We’re here to proclaim. We’re here to proclaim who we are and whose we are.” The church of Our Lady of the Lake is purposely located on Highway 57. When the Church burned two years ago, Father Tom Kirk, who was pastor at the time, called Bishop Steib and wondered out loud whether the Bishop might close the church. “It never crossed my mind,” the Bishop said, “But when you’re rebuilding you might want to get the church out on the highway.”

Approaching from either direction, the church sits nestled in a curve of the highway. It’s stunning lights filled the evening sky on Thursday and people flocked from around the Pickwick Dam area and from as far away as Memphis to fill the Church to overflowing. Bishop Steib began the ceremony outdoors by receiving the deed to the property, the plans for the building and the key to the church. All who had gathered joined in prayer as Bishop Steib called on Father Chiawa, the pastor, to open the doors of the church and all the people followed the Bishop into the Church where he began the sprinkling of the building with holy water, reminding the people of their baptism. Because it is a new church, the Lectionary was presented to the Bishop for his blessing, and the Liturgy of the Word began.

In his homily, Bishop Steib reminded the people of the history of Our Lady of the Lake, and urged them, even though they are a community of 54 families, to remember that the church is not just a church of convenience for summer tourists in and around Pickwick, but instead a church that should be growing and proclaiming the Catholic faith to all in the area. “May rejoicing in the Lord be your strength. May it always be so. May it always be so.”



Bishop J. Terry Steib, S.V.D. accepts the building plans from Sam Marshall (center), Building Committee Chairman, and Joe Wieronski, architect.

Though not frequently celebrated, the dedication of a church is a highly symbolic ritual. After the homily, the Bishop anointed the altar with sacred Chrism, so that it would be ready for worship. Fathers Chiawa and Kirk, the current and former pastors, anointed the walls of the church to remind all who gathered that the building is given over entirely to Christian Worship. Shortly after the anointing ritual, incense was burned on the altar and throughout the church symbolizing that the church is a house of prayer. The house of prayer is then dressed with the necessities of worship \_ the altar cloth is brought forward by the people, and arrangements of lilies, white roses and baby’s breath were carried to places on the altar and candle sticks are placed in appropriate places for celebration awaiting the lighting that will soon take place. Bishop Steib intones the sacred prayer for the lighting of the candles and the deacon then lights candles from the first one blessed by the Bishop. Father Jim Martell, another former pastor, lit the candles that are often attached to the walls of Catholic Churches where the anointings have been made. The altar was ready, the offertory gifts were brought forth, and the Eucharist was celebrated. The House of the House of God - Our Lady of the Lake - was ready to be another “light shining on a hill.”