

**Homily for the Dedication Mass at St. Paul Catholic Church
Jacksonville Beach, Florida
Bishop Felipe J. Estevez
September 26, 2021**

1 Cor. 3:9 : St. Paul once said to the faithful at Corinth, “For we (the people of God) are God’s co-workers.” You’re God’s field, God’s building.

There is such excitement for this new Church, but let’s listen to Paul: you’re God’s building for more important than the house of God is the family...the family of the new house of God: A family in process of becoming a true temple of his glory.

Today it’s the blessing of this holy site. It’s a joy to dedicate the beginning of this work of God and fruit of your generous stewardship for the last five years.

In spite of the 3-year-old pandemic, I’m so thankful for the participation of so many of you and of those with us via online especially of our pastor, Msgr. Michael Houle who worked so hard for this day to happen and has served you with such selfless dedication to provide this magnificent new church.

Msgr. Houle, Father Kelly, and all of you can truly say with the psalmist “how lovely is your dwelling place, oh Lord of hosts. Blessed are they who dwell in your house forever singing your praise.”

What a magnificent place this building is: a permanent site in Jacksonville Beach for gathering a portion of the people of God to hear the Holy Scriptures from the Altar of the Word, to pray together, to take active participation in the sacraments and above all, and most importantly, to celebrate the sacrifice of the Holy Mass!

This beautiful Church must be a place which brings you always to Jesus Christ and it is a symbol of heavenly realities our true destiny: our eternal salvation.

This Church has a title: St. Paul Church. It was established 91 years ago by Bishop Barry, and what a great centennial celebration you will all have here in 2030!

This parish is also blessed with a mission called St. Peter, and so you honor the great apostles of the Christian faith, Saints Peter and Paul!

Being named after Paul, listening Sunday after Sunday to his letters keeps you rooted in the origins of the Catholic Church’s most important apostles.

Everything that happens in St. Paul’s parish is to lead you to Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. All the events taking place in this sacred building are to nurture and strengthen your relationship with the Lord Jesus. If asked by someone, “Who is Jesus?” you must know the answer: Like Peter, each of us can say: “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus is our savior, our redeemer, the eternally begotten of the Father, true God, of one being with the Father, Through Him all things were made...”

In every person there is as St. Augustine said a “restlessness.” God created us with a thirst, a hunger, a deep aspiration, a longing to be united with God. In the history of humanity, we are now in a period of a culture of secularity which regrettably often pushes religion aside. Some people, in fact, all of us are so concerned in the matters of this world, but as St. Augustine said so well, the human heart is restless until each person rests in God alone. As St. Irenaeus said, “The glory of God is the human person fully alive” and a true fully alive person is one in full communion with God. To realize this is such a good awareness. To attain that happiness of walking with God, this church building is needed. For it enables us all and the people of God to praise and worship the holy name of Jesus Christ glorifying the Father in the Holy Spirit.

The people of God attain its greater goal when on Sunday, the day of the Lord, the families of the neighborhood go to the liturgical assembly to praise, to honor, to worship our living God. Our deepest, our truest happiness is to honor God - the source of all blessings. Here each one will be welcome in the House of God and refreshed by the living waters of the Heart of Jesus.

Let us come often to this Church, let our children, our elders, and the young adults meet our Savior, and let the entire neighborhood come and worship the living God.