

Homily for the Feast of the Dedication of St. John Lateran  
St. Joseph's Neier/SFBRHS November 8-9, 2014  
Rev. Kevin Schmittgens

Central Idea: When we work with a longer view in mind, we make our mark on generations to come.

*Do you not know that you are the temple of God,  
and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

He builds a house with his hands  
Thirty years go by it stands  
It stands where nothing stood  
A house of stone  
The mason sleeps real good

If you have never seen the movie, *My Left Foot*, do yourself a big favor rent it, download it or even borrow it from Fr. Kevin if you like. It tells the real life true story of Christy Brown an Irish writer and painter. But Christy Brown was so much more than that. Christy was born with cerebral palsy and, as a result, was almost entirely spastic in his limbs. I say "almost" because Christy had control of one part, and one part only, of his body, the toes on his left foot. The movie, as you might guess, is rather uplifting and inspiring, although there are dark moments, some *very dark* moments, a darkness which may have been a more realistic reflection of Christy's true story. But there is one scene that moved me deeply when I first saw it.

Christy, because of his condition, was thought to be mentally handicapped and impaired. The doctors encouraged his parents to simply put him away in a home, since personal care for him would be grueling and draining and there wouldn't be much to show for it. But Christy's mother, like practically every Irish mother I know, was a force of nature, and was unwavering in her commitment to raise him in a loving, family environment. But no one expected much.

One day, Christy is on the floor and with his left foot he picks up a piece of chalk between his toes and begins to try to scratch something on the wood floor. At first, it just looks like mindless, pointless scrapes. But what begins as a raw, simple thing continues as a daunting, monumental, exhausting task. Poor Christy is grunting and sweating and writhing, practically in tears as he desperately attempts to communicate. It is then that his mother, simply and plainly, encourages her son, thought to be unintelligent, thought to be unreachable, thought to be un-teachable with a straightforward, clear cut command in a beautiful Celtic brogue: **MAKE YOUR MARK, Christy**. The scene is both excruciating and stirring. At the end of this epic struggle, the camera pulls back and we see Christy

flat on the floor, drained and exhausted, with a single, rough, crude word encircling his twisted body: M-O-T-H-E-R. Mother.

The scene is powerful, because the struggle of Christy Brown is the struggle of all of us, of all of humankind, of all of creation even. We all deeply yearn at the bottom of our souls to “make our mark.” We crave to express the longings of our heart, to let all of existence know that we were here and we have made a difference. We seek to articulate our dreams, to scratch out a single, rough, crude word to express our appreciation, our love, our devotion, especially to those who believe that there is something more in us than what others expect. Our marks can be bold, can be delicate, can be unsophisticated, can be profound. We want to make our mark. We want to build something great.

But, make no mistake about it, the process is hard, the struggle is arduous. It is simply a lot of work. Some frustrated by the level of exertion it takes, just give up. Some because it can be so incredibly difficult and hard, settle for superficiality, trifles, small-mindedness. If you have ever felt that way in your life, or if you ever get to that moment, I want you to think of young Christy Brown’s left foot and the beauty that surged from it.

Today we celebrate the dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome, the Pope’s church, the oldest basilica, and the only one of the four major Basilicas I haven’t been in. (Grrrrr!) We remember that long ago as the church struggled for acceptance, struggled to make its mark, the mark of Christ, men and women of Faith, built something great, something of value, something that lasted the centuries.

The word “dedication” comes from a word meaning “proclaim.” Back in the fourth century, Christians proclaimed their faith, made their mark and put aside a place where they scratched out a simple word with a stone church: GRACE. When I think of dedication, I think of those individuals in my life who, like Christy’s mother in his, saw something more in me, that others did, than the world did, than even I did. My parents, siblings, teachers, friends, fellow faculty and staff, even students encouraged me to make my mark in the world and that has made all the difference.

Two summer’s ago, I had the privilege of being in the musical *Working*. One of the songs, is called *The Mason*, and it is about a stone worker and how he simply and methodically builds things. It is about how he make his mark in the world. The song ends:

*He builds a house  
With his hands  
A hundred years go by  
It stands  
It tells you who he was  
A life goes fast*

*But the work a mason does  
It's made to last  
The work a mason does is made to last.*

I would like for all of you to think about how you are going to make your mark. How are you going to build the temple that is your life? Are you willing to do the hard, hard work to scratch out and write something beautiful, as Mother Teresa once said, something beautiful for God. Don't give in to frustration, don't give in to the cynics, don't give in to the difficult, don't give in to the critics, don't give in to the easy way.

Decide to build something, something that lasts.

Make your mark.