

**150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Dedication of Trinity Church, Rock Island IL.**  
**November 12, 2003**

*“Grant O Lord that thy word only may be spoken and thy word only received, +In the Name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Amen.*

*“You are a choose race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” I St. Peter 2:9*

Let me take a moment to tell you who I am, and thank your rector for inviting me and your bishop for giving his consent and willingness to give the pulpit to a visiting fireman from Chicago. I must admit amazement at your graciousness to invite a relatively unknown, but who has had glimpses of your parish over the past 25 yrs. My 1<sup>st</sup> glimpse of Trinity Church was in April of 1978 when seminary classmate Leo Combs was ordained Deacon here by **Bp. Parsons. Carloads** of us came down from **SWTS** to see the 1<sup>st</sup> member of our class ordained. And if any of you remember Fr. Combs, well let’s just say he was quite a character, and we were about best of friends. He would become rector at **St.John’s, Kewanee** and I **vicar** of **St.Anne’s, Morrison & curate** of **Grace Church, Sterling**, where I’d come to know your former rector’s sister. I also came to know of this parish because Mary Moore, a member of the **Cathedral in Davenport**, told me how much she loved coming to Mass here when the Dean (now **Bp.MacBurney**) was on vacation. In 1985 I found myself on a plane headed toward Moline, coming home from California sitting next to **Robert Fairman**, who had been a delegate to the General Convention in Anaheim, Ca. Later in the 80’s & early 1990’s yet another parishioner from Trinity, Rock Island, Jim Standbary attended my parish in Morrison while he was working in Dixon, IL. To make these glimpses come full circle my 8am Mass Server at St.Paul’s by-the-Lake, Chicago, **Scott Morgan** is a dear friend of Fr.McClaskey’s. So again tonight I find myself glimpsing into your parish on a beautiful Anniversary.

**I...** Anniversaries and Churches, Ah! - they bring about good and sometimes funny stories. Like a rural Parish’s Centennial. The Centennial Committee decided there should be 1 particular thing that was given & dedicated to the Church on this occasion. The Committee Chairman had his heart set on a new brass Chandelier for their pristine Colonial Style Church. At the 1<sup>st</sup> committee meeting there was immediately an objection to this proposal. One member had 3 objections; First he said no one in the parish can spell it, Second he didn’t think anyone in the parish could play it, and besides all that, what we really need in this parish is some new light fixtures!

Today you celebrate more than just an anniversary- it is the 150<sup>th</sup> dedication of your parish...one of the earliest parishes in Illinois. Have you noticed our culture today seems to be more youth oriented than respectful of age? That is sad. People in other cultures revere age. In my parish resides a large number of the **Lost Boys of the Sudan**, orphaned at 9yrs old, they see the Church as their mother and priests as Father figures. I’ve become so close to them, that at one of our Thursday night dinners, they decided Fr.Heschlē needed a **Sudanese (Dinka)** name. They huddled together and eventually came to announce it. I was now Fr.Pantheer! Well it sounded like Panther to me, a sleek black cat! Not so lucky, they said it means **“home of the ancients”!**

I said, “What, you mean like, old man ancient?” They laughed & explained they revere age, youth is worthless & besides you are Pantheer because the Church is the “place of the ancients”, home of our real family. The place of the ancients is God’s Church, a little heaven here on earth. They went on “You have opened this Church to us, it is the stability of our lives, the place we

revere the most, our true home, the gates of this parish open to us a glimpse of God's Eternal Kingdom." Wow!

**II...** So what does this have to do with you- with Trinity, Rock Island's 150<sup>th</sup>? It is what every parish should be- a piece of God's Heaven here on earth- and I do mean both you as "*God's people, that royal priesthood, a holy nation*" to quote St. Peter's Epistle, and also your holy buildings. For this is none other than the gate of heaven. Tonight you give me and this neighborhood a glimpse into God's Eternal Kingdom. That is so important, to bring your community a glimpse a glimpse of the spiritual side, the journey of the soul. To many outside these gates are caught in a world of technology, materialism & immorality. They need to see God's Kingdom, the Gospel, and Jesus.

Remember every Palm Sunday the Priest knocking at the Narthex doors & proclaiming from Ps.118 "*open for me the gates of Righteousness...this is the gate of the Lord*"? Do you see? Your parish is **Pantheer**; your priest is another **Fr. Pantheer**. What a holy glimpse I add tonight to my years of glimpses into this parish.

I am saying "*age is a very sacred thing*" and most often brings with it wisdom. My Lutheran friends, who always seem to be studying church growth & survival, say it takes 75 yrs to find out if a parish will make it. That's about 2 generations, and they tell me that's when many churches close their doors and die. You've beaten the odds and doubled it- bravo Trinity! Tonight is a moment to glory in this achievement. But you cannot stop there, nor stay in that moment of glory. You must move on.

**III...** By moving on I mean giving that glory to Jesus. To Jesus in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, to Jesus on His throne of glory in heaven, and to Jesus enshrined in your hearts. (And I know you know what I mean, because you have an active chapter of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament in this parish.) For from such glory will come a glimpse of your mission. I like to think that the difference between a parish and a mission church is that a mission lives mostly for the building up of itself, it looks mostly inward, but a parish is strong enough to become a mission for others, it looks outward.

Now, we all have struggled in the past 4 months with what is going on in our Episcopal Church. It is hard not to become self-absorbed with these events of Minneapolis & New Hampshire. Looking too much inward will depress our mission, send us right off course. When we are not being a mission for others (You know what happens?): the glory fades. Rather we must continue to be a mission for others, directed outward for those who need the good news: "Jesus died to bring us forgiveness of our sins." It will not do, to say we have no sin, or that sins listed in the Bible are no longer sins. (That's what GC keeps trying to do, it don't work!) What we need is to open the gates of righteousness that others can glimpse in and see the glory, and obtain the forgiveness of their sins.

When your rector asked me to preach tonight we had been talking about an appropriate response to the many phone calls priests received after General Convention. I told your bishop & rector that while it rarely happens to me, in this case (as the evangelicals would say) "**God gave me a scripture**". At 1<sup>st</sup> it was just words- so typical Episcopalian, who can't quote chapter & verse, I had to go look it up. The words came from Joshua 24 & 15. Those words I came to quote to the many angry, hurt and despairing Episcopalians who called because they knew us to be the most traditional & conservative parish in the Diocese of Chicago. So I told them "**Joshua 24 & 15**" (hold phone out) it says:

***“BUT AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSEHOLD, WE WILL SERVE THE LORD’. (Repeat)***

**IV...** And doesn't that say it all? From the Gates of Righteousness to the Blessed Sacrament enthroned in the monstrance at benediction- this is God's household, a glimpse of heaven by which we must serve Him and no other Gods. So may I be so bold as to ask you to consider making this your mission by-word?- **Joshua 24:15.**

For these words from Holy Scripture are filled with the power of God's Incarnate Word- Jesus. For I am convinced that people young & old, black & white, 1<sup>st</sup> world & 3<sup>rd</sup> world are looking for that Jesus. Not the Jesus of 'Anything Goes'. Not the Jesus of 'sexual license'. But the Jesus who forgives our sins. And He is right here- in the holiness of the Word and in the Glory of the Tabernacle and in the hearts of His faithful people. What a glimpse it is! A perfect **glimpse** into 150 years of loving Jesus, of being God's heaven here on earth...continue to open the gates of righteousness here, continue to be, as my Sudanese boys say, **“Pantheer”**, make your priest be Fr.Pantheer, so that together you will give more and more people in this neighborhood a glimpse of God's Glory, of the Lord of forgiveness, of our hope of salvation. And when they ask what your parish will do, tell them: “What we've done for the last 150 years”:

***“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord ”*** Because: ***“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, God's own people.”***

***+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.***