



**Homily for the Dedication Mass at St. Paul Catholic Church  
in Jacksonville Beach, Florida, by Bishop Felipe J. Estevez  
September 26, 2021, 2pm**

In First Corinthians 3:9, St. Paul once said to the faithful at Corinth, “For we (the people of God) are God’s co-workers, you are God’s field, God’s building. There is such excitement for this new Church, but as St. Paul says, “You are God’s building, but far more important than the house of God is the family – a family in the process of becoming a true temple of his glory. Today is the blessing of this holy site. It is a joy to dedicate the beginning of this work of God and fruit of your generous stewardship for the last five years.

Despite the existing pandemic, I’m so thankful for the participation of so many of you, especially of your Pastor, Msgr. Michael Houle, who worked so hard for this day to happen and served you with such selfless dedication to bring this magnificent new church into being. Msgr. Houle, Fr. 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. It is a symbol of the heavenly realities of our true destiny – our eternal salvation.

This Church has a title: St. Paul Church. It was established 91 years ago by Bishop Barry. What a great centennial celebration will you all have here in 2030! This parish is also blessed with St. Peter Mission. 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 one 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, 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 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. It enables all 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, and 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. Let the entire neighborhood come and worship the living God.



Bishop Estevez pours Holy Chrism oil on the altar for the consecration. Fr. Kelly anoints the walls.

My dear parishioners,

What joy everyone at St. Paul's parish should have as its new church is dedicated. This church will be a testimony to the faith of Catholics in the beaches' community — past, present and for years to come. It speaks to the "Legacy of Faith" that has been lived here at the Beaches for decades — from the time of the little wooden church on the oceanfront until now and on into the future.

Since we first began to plan for this iconic building five years ago, so many of you have generously stepped up to give of your time, talent and yes — treasure — to make this new church possible. It has always been my hope that this church would incorporate elements of our historic church, as well as elements that are new and unique — that it is a good house for the people of St. Paul's to gather to praise God, to hear the Word proclaimed, and to celebrate the sacraments — all the while passing on the "Legacy of Faith" to future generations.

I regret that because of my injury I was not able to attend our inaugural Masses last weekend or to be here for today's Dedication. My prayers are with all of you.

As the psalmist speaks and the choir has sung — may we come rejoicing to the house of the Lord — now and for years to come! May the grace of this place transform people's lives!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Monsignor Michael Houle, Pastor of St. Paul's

