

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

By JAMES R. LOTHIAN

Pope Benedict, by all accounts, has a *motu proprio* – a papal decree – ready that when issued will lift the restrictions on the celebration of the Old Mass.

Rumours of its announcement have provoked quite varied reactions. The French bishops have been all up in *armes* about it. Many tradition-minded Catholics view it as the panacea, after which only good things will happen.

I personally will chant the Te Deum when the *motu proprio* is finally released. Then, in Benedict's, honor I will crack a nice Bavarian beer, or two.

It will, however, be far from an easy task to bring that sense of God-focused reverence back to a liturgy that in many parishes has become increasingly less so as the years since Vatican II pass.

Can it be done and if you build it will they come? The answer is "yes" on both counts.

St. John Cantius church in Chicago is the example *par excellence* of what can happen if one man has the faith and the vision.

It is a church near and dear to my heart. My son Jim and his wife Sheila were married there. Two of my grand children, their daughter Margaret and their new baby, James, were baptised there – James just last month. I have assisted at Mass at St. John's intermittently for over a decade.

Named after the great fifteenth-century Polish priest-philosopher, St. John Cantius parish has had an interesting history. Polish immigrants founded the church in the late 19th century. The church they built is of cathedral-like proportion. It seats 2000 or thereabouts. At its peak prior to WWI, the parish had 23,000 parishioners. By the late 1980s, however, the situation had changed dramatically. The once thriving Polish-American community surrounding St. John's had given away to urban blight and at Sunday Masses the church was very much more empty than full, and very much in need of refurbishment.

New order of priests

Now, thanks be to God and Our Lady, St. John's is back. The man who brought it back is Fr. C. Frank Phillips, C.R. who assumed the post of pastor quite fittingly on the Feast of the

Assumption in 1988. Fr. Phillips came from Weber High School, a Catholic secondary school in Chicago, where he had been a religious education and music instructor. Fr. Phillips is quite evidently a man who appreciates beautiful liturgical art. He has returned the church to its former splendor and then some, commissioning and importing great works of art from both Italy and Poland.

The liturgy at St. John's is inspiring. Fr. Phillips has also founded a new order of priests, the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius, and fledglings that they may be, they are getting vocations.

Two Tridentine Masses – one high and one low – are celebrated each Sunday and one Tridentine Mass on the other days of the week. It is not uncommon to see 300 or more people at the 7:30 a.m. low Mass on Sunday and two or three times that number at the high Mass, and very much more on major feasts. People come to St. John's from all over the Chicago area and from as far away as neighboring parts of Indiana and Wisconsin. They are a diverse group in virtually every way. Young, large families are particularly well represented. There are also novus ordo Masses in both English and Latin, including a Latin *novus ordo* high Mass on Sundays. All, I am told, are celebrated very reverentially and *ad orientem*.

Outstanding music

Not surprisingly, given Fr. Phillips' background, the music at St. John's – plain chant, polyphonic and classical – is outstanding. There are five – not a typo, five – choirs. One is for children so they can learn the music and when they are grown do their part to promote it. The Chicago Brass Quintet are artists in residence who play at Mass on special feast days.

St. John's web site <http://www.cantius.org/> provides a schedule of Masses with the music played, a list of the many parish activities and much else, including lovely photos of the church, that is well worth perusing.

In Holy Week 2004, I was at St. John's with my family for both the Good Friday service and Easter Mass. The Easter Mass was a solemn pontifical Mass celebrated by His Excellency the Most Reverend Joseph N. Perry, auxiliary bishop of

Chicago. The music was that of the French composer Charles Guonod. The Mass was truly magnificent. The words of the Credo, *resurrexit tertia die*, took on a new, almost palpable, meaning.

Kneeling in the pew at the high Mass in prior to baby James' baptism, and reading the commemoration for the dead in my missal, I was struck by the feeling of continuity that permeates the Old Mass. It is the Mass of our forefathers. They would have felt at home in St. John's and I suspect that many were looking on favourably to see the wee bairn in his christening gown receive the sacrament.

Our Lord started with twelve, St. Ignatius Loyola with five. Great things can indeed happen. The labourers though few can effect profound changes. There is, however, the labour. Pope Benedict's *motu proprio* will make that labour a bit easier.

The Canons Regular

Members of the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius live in common according to the Rule of St. Augustine and their local Rule of Life. Members dedicate themselves to the recovery of the sacred in living the common life, striving for personal sanctity and by seeking the salvation and sanctification of all. In order to achieve these ends, special emphasis will be placed upon the study and implementation of the sacred rites of the Latin Church in their various approved manifestations.

The laity can also affiliate themselves with the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius as Associate Members. These may be men who are considering a religious vocation to the Society or individuals, male or female, married or single, who wish to help the advancement of the Canons Regular of St. John Cantius in their capacity as a member of the laity.

The community's nineteen members include six priests, one deacon, three seminarians, three professed religious brothers and six members in formation

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