

This is my home church, but The Church is my home

Within the four walls of St. Leo's church, my soul was flooded with the grace of baptism and I was made a daughter of God. At the altar step, I received Jesus in the Eucharist each week and, as a high school student, was sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation, to say nothing of the countless confessions whispered over the years.

I sang from the Choir loft and proclaimed the word from the plain wooden ambo. I knelt in prayer, encountering Jesus in Eucharistic adoration and countless daily Masses. My soul was formed within those walls, but it was not those walls that formed my soul.

That is why I approach the closing of St. Leo's with nostalgia and gratitude, but not sadness. It is bittersweet when buildings close; but that is the beauty of the gift of memory. It also shows us the beauty of the Church. We can always have our memories with us, and the Church is with us even more so.

St. Leo's will always be my home church, but the Church – capital C – is my home. She is present where the People of God are present, whether it is in the building called "St. Leo's church", or "St. Cecilia's church," or the catacombs of the Early Church. So, while thinking about St. Leo's brings images of the sanctuary, the Stations of the Cross, the view from the choir loft, and other general aesthetics, all of those are just material things that provided a structure for much deeper spiritual realities being worked in the countless souls that have passed through the doors over the years.

The pieces of St. Leo's that matter are the people; these, I'm fairly certain, are responsible for praying me into my vocation as they saw me coming to Mass and adoration day in and day out when I was in high school. What really matters are the times when grace flowed abundantly into our souls through the Sacraments. The parts of St. Leo's that matter, what makes St. Leo's what it is, and has been, are the opportunities for grace that have taken place there, the friendships and relationships that have been formed there, not because of the location, not because of what it looks like, but because it is part of The Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, the source of all grace.

When the doors to a church close, The Church does not disappear. She continues to be our mother, to offer us the graces of the Sacraments through the hands of her priests. She continues to be a mother to us, a refuge and place where we can find the comfort and consolation we need amidst the trials of life. These graces, that comfort come not from the wood of the pews or carpet of the floor, or paint on the walls, but from Jesus Christ, living and active within his Church – the assembly of the baptized extended through space and time.

When we are baptized we are not baptized into our parish church, we are baptized into the One, Holy Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

The Church is one, regardless of which building you attend for Mass. We are united as one in the celebration of the mysteries that take place in every single Catholic Church throughout the world. We are united as one as we receive the Eucharist at each Mass.

The Church is catholic – she is universal – with Christ ever present within her regardless of what the buildings look like or where they are located. Christ is present not in brick, stone, wood, or even gold or silver. He is present in the Eucharist, he is present in The Word proclaimed, he is present in the members of his body. Regardless of what happens to church buildings, consecrated and holy though they may be, Jesus remains with us, he continues to desire our surrender to him, his grace love and mercy continues to flow abundantly into the hearts of his people.

The Church is holy, she is where we encounter Jesus. Again, not in statues, paintings, or altars or organs. He is in the ones he makes holy through his Sacraments which do not belong to a single parish, but to the whole Church.

When the doors of St. Leo's church close, it will be hard, some may be sad, and many may, rightly, mourn this loss. I pray, though, that no one's faith will be shaken, and that there will be no bitterness or resentment. St. Leo's church is and has been the home church of so many. The church that nourished us, strengthened us, and accompanied us in our Christian lives. But the Church is our true home, and she will never close. She will stand firm both here on earth and into eternity.

I am praying for my fellow parishioners who are saying goodbye to a beloved home, but my deepest prayer is that they look beyond the four walls of St. Leo's at

the beauty of The Church, and allow the healing and consoling love of Jesus to penetrate their hearts and know that he is true and faithful to his promise when he says, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

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