

“HIDDEN SAINTS AND UNSUNG HEROES”

AFTER HOURS SERVICE CALL

On September 23, 1989, when St. John Paul II gave an address to young people in Lucca Italy, he said something that has stuck with me ever since. I was a “rookie” priest and very interested in reading about the saints. I assiduously read my **Butler’s Lives of the Saints** every day. In the midst of speaking about the example of the saints, the Pope made an important clarification. While acknowledging the many canonized saints, calling them “a reflection of God’s light” and “the visible witnesses of the Church’s mysterious holiness,” he then added to the group: “You must look not only to the canonized saints, but also to *all the hidden* saints, the anonymous ones, who sought to insert the Gospel into the ordinariness of their daily tasks.” He continued with an image that is quite powerful, just as it is accessible to all: “They express the Church in her most intimate truth; and at the same time, they preserve the Church from mediocrity, they reform her from within, they see to it that she is always more and more that which she must be, *the Bride of Christ without blemish or wrinkle.*” (cf. Eph. 5:27)

I write this by way of introduction, because many things happen here at the Cathedral, little by little over time, and I wanted to share one such example today. I do so at the risk of leaving others out, and perhaps I’ll share additional examples at another time. Have you noticed anything about the church pews lately? If it seems as though our pews are a little sturdier, a little less unstable, it is because they are. Over the course of the past 18 months, pew by pew, a small but incredibly loyal team of volunteers has gone throughout the Church on Tuesday evenings after closing. When you look around the Cathedral, you may be surprised that much of what you see was added **after 1915**. Surely the walls were present, but they were simple brick, the Mankato limestone walls added later. There was not a hint of marble in 1915, nor any statues, no baldacchino over the high altar, no mosaics or stained glass windows, to name but a few.

However, these pews were in place since the beginning. Certainly, some are damaged with cracks and we’ll continue to work on them. But the structural supports underneath had been deteriorating or were for various reasons no longer present. (See photos.)

That alone was a cause for concern, as the lack of structural support severely weakened the wood of the benches. New ones were crafted, stained and installed. In many cases, metal joints were missing or at least had come completely loose, making it easy to “wobble” the entire pew without trying, leading to more instability. This was no trip to Menard’s— these brackets are custom made from 1/8” thick angle iron to fasten the pews to the floor— approximately 300 brackets throughout the 224 pews!

Nearly three of every four of the pews needed this type of reinforcement. This is because if not fastened to the floor, the pews get twisted and the joints become weak and crack. That has clearly taken place in some pews. The men glued and made repairs to the pews, because of that and age.

But here’s the catch. This work was all done with volunteer labor— dedicated individuals who answered the call to serve, and did so without fanfare. From my room I can see the sacristy light, indicating that someone is still in the building. Let me simply state that more than once as I retired for the evening, that light was still on! I am not sure of the total number of “man hours” for this project, but it was monumental in its scope. This was truly a labor of love and I for one wish to express my profound gratitude to Jerry and his crew. Profound thanks to Jerry Adam, our lead Maintenance engineer. He was joined on Tuesday evenings by John Derosier (Bracket Maker); Brian Deblieck (Repairman & Support Carpenter); Tom Adam and Ron Hartler (Repairmen). Every pew was checked carefully. About 25% of them needed some kind of repair, and we have a lot of pews! Did you know that some of the end pews still have the original kneelers? Most of those have been replaced over the intervening years.

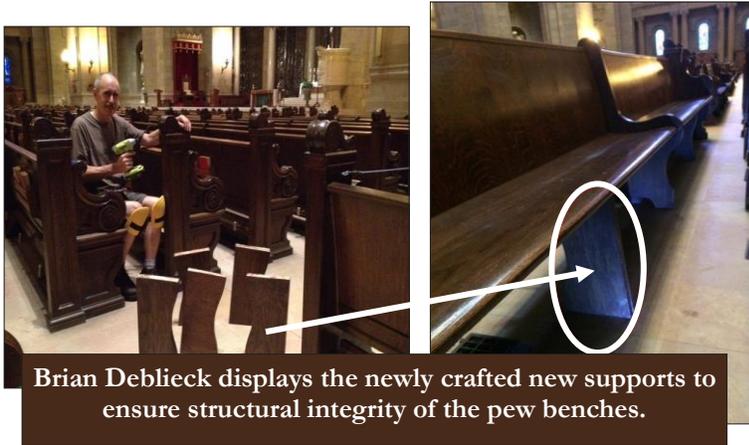
- One hundred years ago today, on **April 2, 1917**, **President Woodrow Wilson** went before a joint session of Congress to request a declaration of war against Germany. Two days later, the Senate ratified his request. What would later become known as World War I had begun for our nation. Frank Buckles, the last American WWI vet, died on 27 February 2011, aged 110 years. God bless all our veterans for their

selfless service to our country.

- You may recall that last winter's only measurable snowstorm cancelled our pre-Christmas cleaning. Our pre-Easter cleaning is scheduled for **next Saturday, April 8 from 9:00-10:30 a.m.** We really could use your help, as there is much to do to prepare our church for Holy Week.
- Restoration at the **Church of the Holy Sepulchre** in Jerusalem ought to be completed by Easter. The painstaking work has taken nine months and cost \$3.3 million. The work has focused on the **Edicule**—the ornate shrine at the site of the tomb built in 1810 A.D.— which was extremely unstable. I once spent five minutes alone inside the tomb, something I'll never forget.
- I have been dreading my **annual Twins prediction** because I'd like to think I am an optimist. In truth, I'm more of a realist. There will be slight improvement, but that is not saying much. They did not address the pitching issue, and a potential starter is out for the season with an injury. I am predicting a 69-93 record. I'd love nothing more than to be wrong.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector



In the photo above, custom-made 1/8 inch brackets were designed to re-secure the pews to the travertine tile floor.



Above photo left to right:
Brian Deblieck, Tom Adam and Ron Hartler.