

Archbishop Smith: Works in Progress

On Sunday I visited St Francis Xavier Parish in Camrose, Alberta. The pastor, Fr Pederson, took me to the site of the new Parish church that he and the parishioners are building. Although it is clearly just a work in progress at this stage, nevertheless it is already beautiful and promises to be something of extraordinary beauty when it is complete.



This puts me in mind of the passage proclaimed at mass that same day from the first letter of John (3:1-2). “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.” We are works in progress. God has already made us something beautiful- his children! But he’s not finished with us yet. By his love and mercy he continually heals and transforms us, until we “see him as he is” and “become like him”. That is a state we cannot full envision, of course, but there is no doubt that the final version will be of a beauty beyond all imagining. What a prospect! The parishioners of Camrose are understandably excited about their new church. This pales in comparison to

the joy and anticipation awakened in us by the teaching of St John!

This teaching is also a necessary corrective to a messaging that is causing great harm today, especially among our young adults. I became aware of this in the course of an encounter I held recently with some university students. They shared with me the great angst – even terror – they feel, stemming from the expectation communicated to them that they have to “create themselves”. This arises from the sea of extreme individualism in which they are swimming, the absolutizing of autonomy that severs them from tradition, robs them of objective reference points, and obscures from their view any destination toward which they might orient their efforts. They feel set adrift, not knowing what to do in this apparently necessary self-creating, and they are left feeling terrified.

But it is all artifice, a contemporary echo of the ancient deception. We are not creators of ourselves. We are creatures and, as such, radically contingent. To realize and accept this is to be set free from the fear induced by falsehood. We are already works in progress. We have been created in love, redeemed by mercy, and given direction in hope. This is all from God, who alone is Creator, and who constantly re-fashions us by his grace in accordance with his saving plan for each of us. Far from terrorizing, this truth is exhilarating! May God help us to embrace this truth, and so live freely and joyfully as his children, his beloved works in progress.