

"It's About More Than A Building

November 30, 2004"

For many reasons, not the least of which is the dwindling number of young men going into the priesthood, the Roman Catholic church has been forced to close many churches in eastern Massachusetts. One of those churches, St. James, is located in Wellesley. St. James has been around for a long, long time - the site of many first communions, baptisms, weddings, funerals, parish suppers, Advent services, Easter services, etc, etc, etc, - in other words, **lifetimes of memories**. That's why the good folks of St. James are participating in a round the clock vigil to save the church ... a vigil that is now 34 days long.

Good for them!

Now I can already hear my evangelical friends reminding me that the church is not a building - it is a people - and of course, they are technically correct. The Greek word that comes closest to "church" actually means "an assembly, a gathering of people." The argument runs that the church building could burn down to the ground, but the church still exists. Yes ... true ... but ... I am so sick and tired of hearing about the necessity for change ... the necessity for new traditions and new understandings. What happened to the importance of memory? What happened to the validity of long standing traditions?

Go ahead ... call me a curmudgeon ... I don't mind. For example, I hate to see these "tear downs" that are ravaging our community. Small homes that have housed lifetimes of sacred memories for families are now being unceremoniously torn down by new owners to build residences of palatial proportions. Imagine being away from your childhood home for several years and then one day, like Odysseus, you return "home" to find that it has vanished from the face of the earth. Fie! I say! Fie on them all!

So ... one of these days I'm going to go down to St. James and sit with those good folks. Paul Simon warned us, you know. In the title song from his "Bookends" album (his finest work according to my judgment), he writes,

"Time it was, and what a time it was ...

It was a time of innocence, a time of confidences.

Long ago ... it must be ... I have a photograph,

Preserve your memories; They're all that's left you."