

**April 5, 2009**  
**Homily**

“The Wisdom of Olive Trees”

It is the season of planting. The season of hope. And faith, really. For we put a seed into the ground and despite all appearances, despite all logic, we wait for a miracle. We believe with all our hearts that, out of that bare patch of ground, will spring green shoots. A green plant, full of juice and life and sunshine. And that those green shoots will flower, will, again by some miracle, some process beyond our mere human powers to emulate, produce a tomato or a sunflower or a zucchini. If that doesn't seem like a miracle to us, we need to open our eyes and take a closer look.

What will you plant this spring?

What will we plant? What gifts of spirit? What gifts of love, beauty and justice are already planted deep within this community of dreamers, this community of faith? And what must we do to bring this strong yet vulnerable growth to new life, again and again, year after year, so that our children and our children's children will reap its fruits of love, beauty, justice and truth?

The olive tree is very nearly indestructible. It lives for centuries. Chop it down and it grows back. It provides beauty and shade and fruit and olive oil – the oil of healing, the oil of blessing, the oil of gladness that we sing about – for generation after generation. Yet it does not spring spontaneously from the earth. Someone planted that grove of trees. Someone tended it with loving care. And waited, with hope and faith, for the day when it would bear fruit. And nurtured and protected it, fed it and pruned it, that it would feed generations yet unconceived.

Do we have such hope and such faith? This congregation has shown again and again that it does. Chop us down and we grow back. You have lost beloved ministers and learned from this that the ministry of this church was yours – that this church was larger and its roots deeper than its leadership alone. You have wandered from one church building to another, a church without a home, and you found that this church was more than a building, this congregation was stronger and its roots deeper, its dreams more expansive than you even knew. This church flourishes when it is challenged. Because its roots – the roots of a two hundred year-old faith, a faith in reason and tolerance and freedom – its roots run deep and are nourished with love and sacrifice – your love and your sacrifice.

And our dreams grow high and wide. We dream of spreading our branches to offer shade to all who seek peace and food to all whose spirits hunger. We know this takes years, even generations, and we are willing – we are dedicated – to nurturing this tree of abundant hopes for we know that the world needs its gifts, even as we do.

We are the gardeners of the spirit. We and we alone can ensure that this lovely and life-giving tree will bear fruit to feed the spirits of our families, the spirits of the stranger, the spirits of future generations. We and we alone can ensure that, despite

storms and drought, change and challenge, this church will grow stronger and give more bountifully of itself to all who seek its shelter and its nourishment. Only we can care for this beloved community, this life-giving and life-sustaining church, and its dreams of a world in which no one goes hungry, in which no one is unloved, in which no one is insignificant.

And we will. This is our calling, and this is our difficult and joyful privilege.